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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FRENCH GENERALSHIP

DURING THE

GREAT RETREAT OF 1914

BY

BRIAN ANDREW JEVONS

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

FALL 1990

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FRENCH GENERALSHIP

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GREAT RETREAT OF 1914

SUBMITTED BY Brian Andrew Jevons

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

U. Trumpener, Supervisor

P.E. Prestwich, Committee Member

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ABSTRACT

The subject of this thesis is the generalship of the ten French army commanders during the Battle of the Frontiers and the Great Retreat. Although the military leadership of these officers has been treated in numerous books, no in-depth study exists of their performance from August 20 to September 5, 1914.

Inexorably linked with an assessment of each army commander's success or failure on the battlefield is the need to evaluate Generalissimo Joseph Joffre's judgment because he had to make the decision to retain or remove an army commander. A central theme of this study is that the evidence provides sufficient proof of Joffre's sagacity in selecting leaders with the qualities and skills required to command armies, and of their competence in conducting operations and supplying troops during the opening campaign of World War I.

The Commander-in-Chief of the French Army also placed considerable emphasis on a general's ability to work co-operatively with superiors, allies, colleagues and subordinates, but he regarded good health as the primary quality for a senior officer to have. Joffre retained the seven army commanders who, in his opinion, were performing their duties in a calm and energetic manner, and removed the three whom he believed had become nervous and/or unenergetic. The Generalissimo cashiered Paul Pau and Charles Lanrezac, whose deteriorating emotional and physical health eventually began to have an adverse affect on their judgment. However,

since Joffre replaced more than one hundred generals in a mere five weeks, some wrongful dismissals occurred. Removing Pierre Ruffey, whose constitution remained strong, was the only incorrect personnel decision that the Commander-in-Chief made with respect to the ten army commanders during the Battle of the Frontiers and the Great Retreat.

PREFACE

The Battle of the Frontiers and the Great Retreat of the French and British armies to the Marne River occurred from August 20 to September 5, 1914. During that period of almost unrelieved Allied defeats, Generalissimo[1] Joseph Joffre, the Commander-in-Chief of the French Army, replaced more than one hundred generals[2] whom he deemed incompetent because it was, in his opinion, a requisite for achieving victory.[3] Among the limogés[4] were Paul Pau, Pierre Ruffey and Charles Lanrezac, three of France's ten army commanders. Most historians defend Joffre's personnel changes in sum, but many of these same scholars acknowledge the possibility of his fallibility in certain individual cases.[5] The most famous case of possible wrongful dismissal was that of Lanrezac, whose generalship still provokes such lively debate among historians that the leadership and replacement of the other generals, including Pau and Ruffey, are largely ignored.[6] This study will attempt to fill an obvious gap in scholarship by examining the generalship of all ten army commanders; it will compare the martial qualities and defects of the three limogés with those of Generals Auguste Dubail, Edouard de Castelnau, Maurice Sarrail, Fernand de Langle, Ferdinand Foch, Louis Franchet d'Esperey and Michel Maunoury (the seven army commanders who retained their posts) in order to determine whether Joffre's assessments of these subordinates' suitability for higher command were always correct.

The importance of the following qualities of generalship

will be discussed in chapter one: the army commanders' intelligence, previous combat experience, health and age in July 1914, educational background, belief in a transcendental cause, co-operation with colleagues, physical courage, understanding of logistics, and ability as strategists and tacticians.[7] Chapter two will be devoted to an analysis of the generals' judgment in combat. The final chapter will evaluate the relationships of the army commanders with their allies (if any), superiors and subordinates, as well as their physical and mental condition under the stress of directing large units in battle.

The selection of the dates for the beginning and end of this study requires a brief explanation. Germany declared war on France on August 3. Military operations on the Western Front[8] involved only minor clashes and then a virtually unopposed French offensive into the provinces of Alsace and German Lorraine[9] until August 20 when the Germans counter-attacked violently. Consequently, the beginning of the Battle of the Frontiers marks the first time that French generalship can be accurately assessed, for almost any field commanders would have been successful prior to that date due to the Germans' strategy of withdrawing by design. September 5 is a convenient date for the termination of this study because most historians consider the following day to have been the start of the Battle of the Marne proper. Joffre had found the seven army commanders in whom he had the utmost confidence, and none of them would lose his post until July 1915.

The strengths and weaknesses of the German Schlieffen Plan[10] for the conquest of France and the French Plan XVII[11] for the invasion of Germany will not be analyzed because they are not germane to this study; however, a brief description of each will be given in chapter one, for it is relevant to know that the army commanders were obliged to execute the orders of their superiors to the best of their ability, even those orders about whose sagacity they harboured serious doubts.[12] Discussion of the British Expeditionary Force (henceforth referred to as "the BEF") will be limited to how the attitude and behaviour of its commanding officer, Field-Marshal Sir John French, affected the generalship of Lanrezac, Franchet d'Esperey and Maunoury, whose units fought on either side of the BEF. As for the German Army, only the way in which its numbers, deployment and performance had a direct bearing on the generalship of any given French commander will be mentioned. No attempt will be made to resolve the controversy over whether Joffre himself or General Joseph Gallieni, the Military Governor of Paris, was primarily responsible for the former's decision of September 4 to counter-attack the Germans on the Marne two days later, for Roy Prete has already analyzed that dispute in his excellent doctoral dissertation "The War of Movement on the Western Front, August-November 1914: A Study in Coalition Warfare."[13]

This study is not a history of France and her Army from 1911 to 1914; nevertheless, a brief analysis of each will be included in chapter one in order to reveal how France's

diplomacy, politics and military preparations affected the operations of the ten generals who would direct the nation's armies in August and September 1914.

Les Armées Françaises dans la Grande Guerre (the French official history of the war, which henceforth will be referred to as "the AFGG"), and the memoirs of Joffre and Major-General Sir Edward Spears are the best sources of information on French generalship. Spears, a lieutenant in 1914, was attached to the French Fifth Army as British Liaison Officer, and, in that capacity, had the opportunity to evaluate Lanrezac and Franchet d'Esperey's leadership. The authors of the relatively few secondary works on the opening weeks of the war seldom discuss the generalship of the ten army commanders. French newspapers of the period do not mention the performances and dismissals of the field commanders because wartime censorship laws forbade even the publication of the names of generals.[14] Samuel R. Williamson's The Politics of Grand Strategy: Britain and France Prepare for War, 1904-1914 is the standard work on Anglo-French diplomatic relations of that period. Henry Contamine's La Revanche 1871-1914, David B. Ralston's, The Army of the Republic: The Place of the Military in the Political Evolution of France, 1871-1914, Douglas Porch's The March to the Marne: The French Army 1871-1914, and William Serman's Les Officiers Français dans la Nation (1848-1914) yield a wealth of facts and figures about the French Army during the years immediately preceding World War I. Field-Marshal Sir Archibald Wavell's Soldiers and

Soldiering or Epithets of War is the best available book on the traits and abilities that generals need to perform well in combat. Holger H. Herwig and Neil M. Heyman's Biographical Dictionary of World War I provides much valuable information on the personal qualities and martial talents of the French and German army commanders of 1914.

Since the documents which appear in the AFGG for the period from August 20 to September 5, 1914 include very few orders that pertain to judgment and because the number of available memoirs and secondary sources is limited, this study does not claim to be the definitive work on the generalship of the ten French army commanders during the Battle of the Frontiers and the Great Retreat. It is, however, the first examination of a largely neglected but interesting field of military history, which it is hoped will inspire other historians to explore the subject.

NOTES TO THE PREFACE

[1] "Generalissimo" was an unofficial appellation given to Joffre in 1914; his official title was le Général Commandant en Chef. See Général Fernand de Langle de Cary, Souvenirs de Commandement 1914-1916 (Paris: Payot, 1935), p. 154; Etat-Major de l'Armée Française, Les Armées Françaises dans la Grande Guerre. Tome Premier (T1): La Guerre de Mouvement (Opérations Antérieures au Novembre 1914). Trois volumes de texte (1, 2, 3), quatre volumes d'annexes (A). (Paris Imprimerie Nationale 1922-1931), T1:1 (A) no. 53.

Throughout this study, the words Generalissimo and Commander-in-Chief will be used interchangeably to designate Joffre's post.

[2] Henri Isselin, The Battle of the Marne (London: Elek Books, 1965), p.96; Paul Allard, L'Oreille Fendue: Les Généraux Limogés Pendant la Guerre (Paris: Les Editions de France, 1933), p. 15. Isselin claims that 134 generals were dismissed; Allard puts the number at 202.

[3] Maréchal Joseph Joffre, Mémoires du Maréchal Joffre, 1910-1917. Tome Premier (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1932), pp. 301-305.

[4] This noun, which became part of the French language in 1914, was derived from the town of Limoges in central France. Dismissed generals were referred to as limogés because they had to travel to Limoges to receive orders for their new assignments, which almost invariably resulted in their being stationed there or in other rear-echelon zones. See Georges Blond, The Marne (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Stackpole Books, 1966), p. 62 n.; Barbara W. Tuchman, The Guns of August (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962), p. 187; Kate Caffrey, Farewell, Leicester Square: The Old Contemptibles 12 August-19 November 1914 (London: André Deutsch, 1980), p. 91.

In the strictest sense of the word, Lanrezac was not a limogé, for he never went to Limoges, perhaps because his rank and Joffre's esteem for him spared the former Commander of the Fifth Army that indignity. The Generalissimo did not offer Pau another field command after he disbanded the Seventh Army. Details of Lanrezac and Pau's subsequent military careers are found in the conclusions of this study. Information on Ruffey's life after his dismissal is extremely limited. Despite the aforementioned considerations, these three army commanders will be referred to as limogés throughout this study, for they, like the lower-ranking generals whom Joffre replaced, lost their field commands. The Generalissimo's special treatment of Lanrezac and Pau (and possibly Ruffey) did not change that all-important fact.

[5] David B. Ralston, The Army of the Republic: The Place of the Military in the Political Evolution of France, 1871-1914 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The M.I.T. Press, 1967), p. 338;

Pierre Dominique, La Victoire de la Marne (Paris: Editions Berger-Levrault, 1964), p. 354; Henry Contamine, La Victoire de la Marne (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1970), pp. 188-191; Tuchman, The Guns of August, p. 417; Allard, L'Oreille Fendue, p.17.

[6] See David Ascoli, The Mons Star: The British Expeditionary Force 5 Aug.-22 Nov. 1914 (London: Harrap Limited, 1981), pp. 125-128, 138 for a negative assessment of Lanrezac's generalship. The latter's most recent defender is W.A. Stewart, the author of "Lanrezac, Joffre, and Plan XVII." Military Affairs, XXXII (February 1969), pp. 181-190.

Henri Isselin mentions Ruffey only twice in his book The Battle of the Marne. Moreover, the available sources provide little information about Ruffey's life before the war and after his dismissal on August 30. He did not leave any known memoirs, and, in contrast to Lanrezac, has not had any historian attempt to rehabilitate his reputation. That such a prominent general could have virtually disappeared from the historical record is surprising and puzzling.

[7] The list of the qualities and skills of generalship is arbitrary and, therefore, cannot claim to be all-inclusive. One important skill of martial leadership that has been omitted is the ability to motivate troops, which Baron Henri de Jomini, the famous nineteenth-century French Swiss military theorist, rightly considered a vital task for generals. See Baron Henri de Jomini, Introduction à l'Etude des Grandes Combinaisons de la Stratégie et de la Tactique (Paris: Anselin, 1830), pp. 44-45.

However, it should be noted that Jomini's book was primarily written for the edification of future supreme commanders. During the years immediately preceding World War I, the responsibility for motivating the common soldiers mainly rested with Joffre. As will be shown in chapter one of this study, the Generalissimo's enthusiasm for the theory of the all-out offensive did inspire the French troops to fight valiantly despite severe adversity during the Great Retreat.

The ten army commanders of 1914 were far less involved in providing troops with a sense of purpose; therefore, their ability to motivate common soldiers will not be discussed further in this study.

[8] "Western Front" is the English translation of the German name for the entire theatre of operations in France and Belgium. To the French, it was the "North-East Front." The name "Western Front" will be used throughout this study, however, because it is the appellation commonly used in the English-speaking nations.

[9] After having lost the Franco-Prussian War in 1871, France had ceded Alsace and part of Lorraine to Germany. Frenchmen remained bitter over that provision of the Treaty of

Frankfurt. Consequently, the French Army wanted to recapture those provinces as quickly as possible in the event of war between Paris and Berlin, even if it meant placing purely political considerations above sound military strategy.

[10] The Schlieffen Plan was named after its architect, General Count Alfred von Schlieffen, Chief of the German General Staff from 1891 to 1906.

[11] It was called Plan XVII because the French Army had formulated sixteen others from 1875 to 1909.

[12] De Castelnau, the Commander of the Second Army in 1914, had always favoured an offensive into Germany through the plain of neutral Belgium, but diplomatic considerations denied the use of that route to him. Consequently, he was obliged to obey the orders of Joffre (and, by extension, those of the French Government) and attack through German Lorraine despite his misgivings about its rugged terrain. Victor Giraud, Le Général de Castelnau (Paris: Les Editions G. Crès & Compagnie, 1921), pp. 31-32.

[13] Roy A. Prete, "The War of Movement on the Western Front, August-November 1914: A Study in Coalition Warfare" (Edmonton: Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Alberta, 1979), pp. 273-308.

[14] Tuchman, The Guns of August, p. 188.

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CHAPTER I

THE PREPARATIONS OF THE FRENCH ARMY AND ITS TEN ARMY COMMANDERS OF 1914 FOR WAR

PART A

THE FRENCH ARMY'S PREPARATIONS FOR WAR, 1911-1914

During the last twenty years before World War I, the Great Powers of Europe were divided into two antagonistic camps: Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy formed the Triple Alliance, which opposed the Dual Alliance of France and Russia. Great Britain signed an Entente Cordiale with France in 1904 and another with Russia three years later, but these acccrds did not commit London to participate in any future conflict on the continent.

Germany's unsuccessful attempt to destroy the Anglo-French entente and expand her economic influence in Morocco at the expense of France in 1911 became known as "The Agadir Crisis." Britain supported France because she feared the possibility of Germany retaining the occupied Moroccan port of Agadir as a base from which her powerful fleet could attack British shipping in a future war. Berlin's clumsy diplomacy strengthened military and naval ties between Paris and London, unleashed a potent outburst of nationalism in France, and galvanized the French Army to prepare itself more thoroughly for war.[1]

On July 28, 1911, the Ministry of Premier Joseph Caillaux appointed General Joffre, an advocate of an immediate all-out offensive into Germany, to replace General Victor Michel as Commander-in-Chief designate in the event of war. The latter had proposed a plan which anticipated a strong German presence west of the Meuse River in Belgium; to counter it, he advocated stationing most of his units between the French Meuse and the English Channel while deploying only a small force to defend French Lorraine and Alsace. The entire Army would maintain a defensive posture until the Germans clearly manifested their intentions, and Michel would then order a counter-offensive. This strategy seemed too passive to suit Adolphe Messimy, the Minister of War, and the vast majority of French generals. Le Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre (henceforth referred to as "the Supreme War Council"), an advisory board of the generals who would command the nation's designated armies (France did not have peacetime armies; the corps was her largest military unit) upon the outbreak of war, unanimously rejected the plan on July 19. Michel resigned two days later, and his titles of Commander-in-Chief designate and Vice-President of the Supreme War Council were abolished.

The Ministry designated Joffre's new post as Chief of the General Staff, and it granted him substantial powers in organizing and directing the peacetime Army, which earlier ministries had denied to his predecessors because many politicians of the Third Republic feared that concentrating

too much power in the hands of one general might result in a coup d' état. The Agadir Crisis convinced the politicians that the Germans posed a greater threat than their own generals, and they decided to end the Army's system of divided command by greatly reducing the number of functions exercised by the Chief of Staff of the Army (the peacetime Commander-in-Chief), and placing them under Joffre's control. Therefore, the new Chief of the General Staff was able to implement measures which he deemed necessary to improve the Army's readiness for war, whereas Michel had only been allowed to observe the Chief of Staff of the Army prepare the units that he himself would lead in battle. Joffre assumed responsibility for the Army's strategy, tactics, logistics, plan of mobilization and deployment prior to the start of mobilization.

Messimy implemented another reform that improved military efficiency: he granted each designated army commander the right to inspect the several corps which would constitute his wartime army, and to organize a small headquarters staff for it.[2]

Since Joffre, an engineer, did not possess a great deal of theoretical or practical expertise in military strategy, he and the other members of the Supreme War Council persuaded Messimy to appoint de Castelnau, a skilful staff officer and partisan of the offensive school of military thought, as his Assistant Chief of Staff. Their doctrine resulted in fewer

fortifications being built, especially north of the Franco-German frontier. Once the French Army was forced to retreat in 1914, an insufficient number of defensive positions existed to delay the German march towards Paris.

However, the theory of the all-out offensive did have one positive effect: it instilled in the French soldiers a nearly indestructible belief in their ability to defeat the Germans, which proved invaluable in 1914. The French troops maintained their high morale despite early defeats and heavy casualties; they never lost hope and eventually proved themselves the equal of their German counterparts during the Battle of the Marne.[3]

On the eve of the war, the French had to find a way to overcome a serious disadvantage in manpower vis-à-vis the Germans, for France's population stood at only thirty-nine millions, twenty-eight millions fewer than that of her potential enemy. If both countries retained the two-year draft, Joffre estimated that Germany would have a standing army of 860,000 men by the end of 1914, whereas only 525,000 Frenchmen would be stationed in Metropolitan France. In March 1913, he, therefore, asked the Ministry of Premier Raymond Poincaré, a staunch conservative nationalist, to introduce a three-year period of military service. The Chief of the General Staff argued that this measure would raise the number of troops in the homeland to 710,000, and if twenty percent of the German Army were diverted to defend Germany's eastern

marches against the Russians, numerical parity would be achieved on the Western Front. Thanks to the recent Agadir Crisis and the resultant nationalist revival, the bill passed easily in the French Parliament.[4]

The French and British high commands began to co-operate more closely during the Agadir Crisis. In September 1911, General Henry Wilson, the Director of Military Operations in the War Office, and Joffre agreed that, in the event of armed conflict between Paris and Berlin, 150,000 British soldiers would be ready for duty near the French town of Maubeuge thirteen days after the start of mobilization. The BEF's location on the extreme left wing of the Allied armies would enable it to strike the right flank of the German Army should it act in the way the French expected by invading Belgium east of the Meuse. Wilson, however, neglected to inform Joffre that he was not the official spokesman for Britain. Consequently, their agreement did not mean that Paris could automatically count on London to intervene in a Franco-German war.[5]

The accelerated construction of capital ships decreed by the German Navy Law of 1912 menaced Britain's maritime supremacy, and impelled London to enter into even more serious naval conversations with France. In November, the Royal Navy pledged to defend the French littoral along the English Channel against the German fleet and to ensure the safe passage of the BEF across the Strait of Dover, if Berlin were

the aggressor in an armed conflict with Paris. The French Navy promised to protect British interests in the Mediterranean Sea by playing the primary role in opposing enemy forces there and to transport French troops from North Africa to France. This development did not, however, commit Westminster to participate actively in any future Franco-German war, for most British cabinet ministers were not even aware that these naval conversations had taken place.[6]

While the French and British high commands were formulating their strategy, the Chief of the German General Staff, General Helmuth von Moltke, had to confront two of the same difficulties which would vex Joffre: the necessity of placing both diplomatic and political exigencies above military priorities. General Count Alfred von Schlieffen, Moltke's predecessor, had accurately forecast the eventual French strategy of respecting Belgium's territorial integrity, while immediately advancing into Alsace and German Lorraine to "liberate" the citizens of those provinces. Schlieffen, who gambled on defeating France in a mere six weeks, decided to station only two small armies along the Franco-German border and have them retire as soon as the enemy launched his offensive; this strategem, he hoped, would convince the French to commit even larger forces to the area. His troops would then halt and hold their adversary in check. Meanwhile, five huge German armies would march through Belgium and the Netherlands with the goal of outflanking the entire French

Army, passing west of Paris, then turning eastward, and finally crushing the foe between themselves and their comrades already fighting in Alsace and German Lorraine.

Schlieffen had also correctly postulated the Russians' strategy of an invasion of East Prussia. He planned to counter it by having the few German units there conduct a slow withdrawal as far as the Vistula River. By the time they reached it, the Chief of the General Staff foresaw an end to the conflict on the Western Front, which would enable the bulk of the German Army to move eastward and bring the war to a victorious conclusion by defeating the Russian Army in a few weeks.

However, Moltke wanted to use the seaports of a neutral Netherlands as "windows on the world" through which Germany could trade with foreign countries, for he expected that a British naval blockade of the North Sea coastline would reduce German commerce from the homeland with most other nations to almost nil. Consequently, Moltke decided to respect Dutch neutrality. This change in strategy caused a serious problem: the two northernmost German armies would be forced to advance through a narrow corridor between the Dutch province of Limburg and the heavily fortified Belgian city of Liège. These armies, the largest of the German forces, were the ones which would have to march the fastest if Schlieffen's strategy of enveloping the French left wing were to end in success, but Moltke's modification meant that they would lose valuable time

from the outset of the campaign due to the delays entailed by moving through such a restricted space. Then Moltke, deciding that it would be bad for civilian morale to cede too much German territory voluntarily, reduced the distance of Schlieffen's proposed withdrawal in Alsace and German Lorraine and provided for eight of the thirteen divisions raised from 1905 to 1914 to be sent there. For the same reason, he planned to dispatch additional units to East Prussia and elected to defend its border rather than retreat by design. As a result of Moltke's changes, the ratio of troops on the right wing to the left wing fell from Schlieffen's intended 7:1 to 7:2 on the Western Front. However, the former did not weaken his right wing in absolute numbers, for it still consisted of fifty-four divisions.[7]

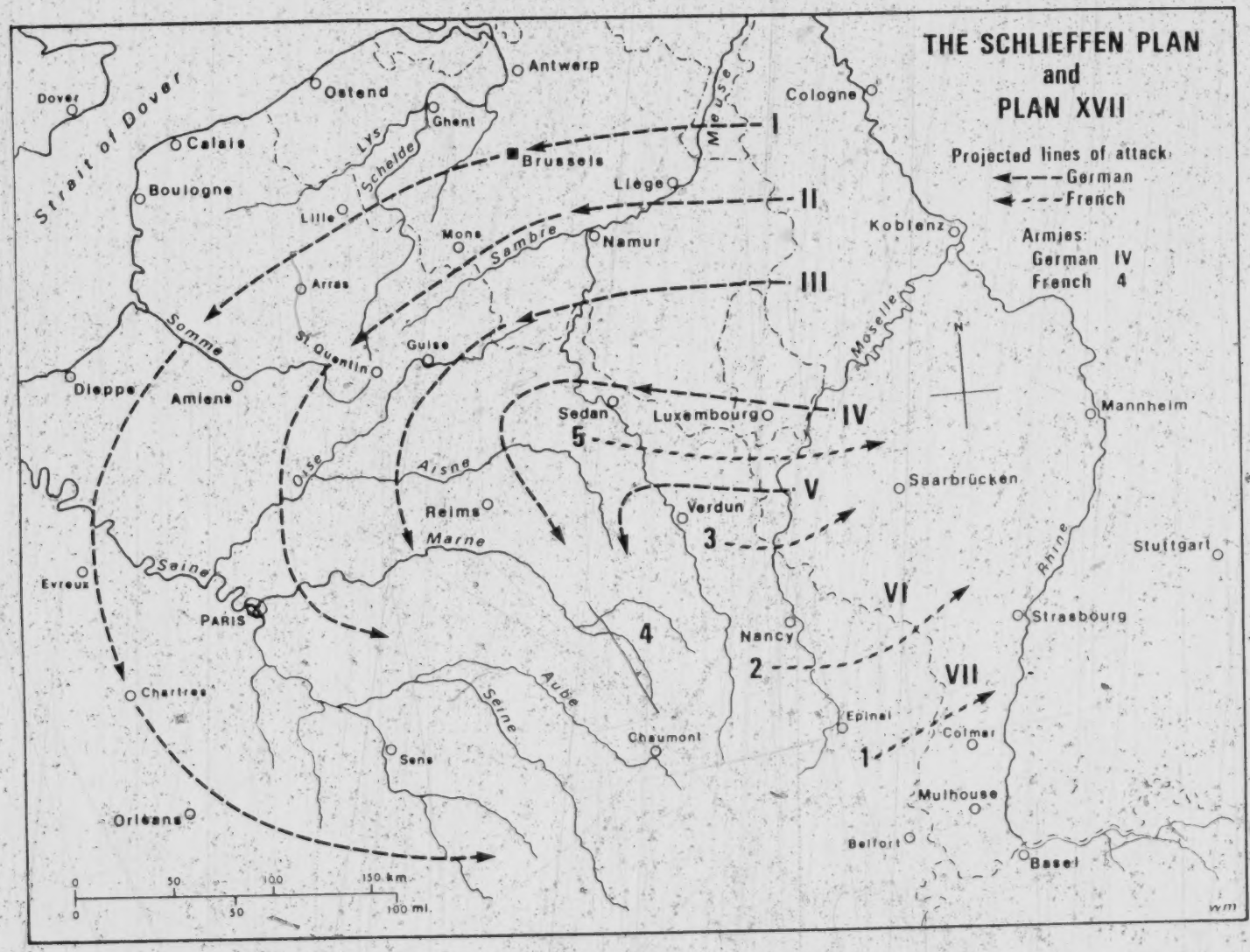
Meanwhile, Joffre and de Castelnau were formulating a new plan to replace Plan XVI, which was based on the defensive-offensive strategy. Although they desired to launch an all-out offensive into Germany as soon as possible after a declaration of war, two unanswered questions haunted them: Would the diplomatic situation allow the passage of the French Army through the plain of neutral Belgium, which was much easier terrain to cross than the marshes of German Lorraine or the forests of Alsace? And was it wise for them to count on the support of the Russian, Belgian and British armies, as well as Italian neutrality? Joffre consulted Le Conseil de Défense National (henceforth referred to as "the Council of

National Defence"), an inner cabinet comprised of the President, Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, War Minister and Marine Minister. The Chief of the General Staff learned that Russia had pledged to invade Germany with a minimum of 700,000 troops only sixteen days after the start of mobilization. Since the Belgians seemed determined to resist all invading armies, French units could not precede the Germans into Belgium, or France would lose Britain's support. The Council of National Defence was unable to divine London's ultimate intentions if Germany were the first nation to violate Belgian neutrality. The still secret Franco-Italian Colonial Accord of 1902, combined with Rome's virulent anti-Austrian sentiments, practically made Italy's neutrality a certainty, in which case the four French divisions stationed along the Franco-Italian border could leave the Alps and take up positions in north-eastern France shortly after the beginning of hostilities. In light of his political superiors' assessment of the likely diplomatic situation upon the outbreak of war, Joffre realized his freedom of action would be somewhat restricted. He and de Castelnau reluctantly complied with the politicians' guidelines, and planned to invade Germany through Alsace and German Lorraine despite the unfavourable terrain of those provinces; and their Plan XVII, while not entirely discounting the possibility of British assistance, did not provide for it.[8]

Joffre presented Plan XVII to the Council of National

Defence in April 1913. Like Plan XVI, it did not make any provision for a massive German invasion through western Belgium because the Chief of the General Staff remained absolutely certain that the enemy would lack the manpower to do so unless he used reserves alongside regular troops. Joffre dismissed this possibility because French reserves were too poorly trained to serve in the front line, and he erroneously believed that German reserves were equally unsuited for such duty.

As Schlieffen had forecast, the main French effort would be aimed at seizing Alsace and German Lorraine. Joffre planned to use his two southernmost armies, the First and Second, for that purpose. Elsewhere, the Third Army would attack east of the German fortified city of Metz. The Fifth Army would advance west of Metz. The Chief of the General Staff planned to use the Fourth Army as a reserve. Joffre did not specify what his subordinates' objectives would be afterward, for he did not believe in formulating detailed plans until actual combat had revealed the enemy's intentions.[9]


THE SCHLIEFFEN PLAN
and
PLAN XVII
Projected lines of attack
German
French
Armies:
German IV
French 4
Dover
Strait of Dover
Calais
Boulogne
Ostend
Ghent
Antwerp
Lys
Schelde
Brussels
Meuse
Cologne
Liège
Lille
Mons
Sambre
Namur
Koblenz
Arras
Somme
St. Quentin
Guise
Moselle
Dieppe
Amiens
Sedan
Luxembourg
Mannheim
Oise
Aisne
Saarbrücken
Reims
Verdun
Marne
Stuttgart
Evreux
Seine
PARIS
Rhine
Strasbourg
Nancy
Chartres
Aube
Epinal
Colmar
Chaumont
Sens
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Orléans
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I
II
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1
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PART B

THE TEN FRENCH ARMY COMMANDERS' QUALITIES OF GENERALSHIP BEFORE WORLD WAR I

Few military historians discuss generalship. While the reasons for their reluctance cannot be stated with any degree of certainty, one explanation might be that martial leadership is not an exact science which readily lends itself to an accurate evaluation from archival documents; rather, it will probably forever remain an intangible art, for neither army officers nor scholars possess the insight to explain fully why soldiers will risk their lives by advancing towards an armed, resolute enemy simply because a general, probably far behind the front, has ordered them to do so. [10]

Historians and military writers may not be able to give a concise, dictionary definition of what constitutes good generalship, but they do recognize that competent generals possess certain qualities and abilities which contribute to their success on the battlefield. These leaders are usually intelligent, experienced in combat, relatively young, robust, educated, motivated by strong beliefs, co-operative, physically courageous, and skilful in the fields of logistics and strategy. The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to attempting to determine whether or not the ten French army commanders of 1914 possessed them.

While above-average intelligence is almost invariably an absolute necessity for an officer to attain general rank in peacetime, it does not automatically guarantee that he will be a successful field commander in wartime because intellectual brilliance and the ability to lead troops are often mutually exclusive qualities.[11]

An assessment of the French army commanders of 1914 proves the veracity of this statement: all ten were intelligent;[12] yet Joffre felt obliged to replace three of them after only two weeks of full-scale combat. Lanrezac, formerly a professor of military strategy at l'Ecole de Guerre (henceforth referred to as the "War College"), was considered by Joffre to be one of the most intelligent officers in the Army. Pau directed a group of officers which drafted the Army's definitive manual on the correct methods of leading large units, and Messimy had regarded him as the one who should have succeeded Michel in 1911. Ruffey was arguably the most intelligent army commander. The Generalissimo later wrote of his subordinate's "brilliant mind and ... fertile imagination."[13] Ruffey, a former professor of artillery at the War College, dreamed of using paratroopers and had suggested, long before 1914, the formation of an air force of several thousand aeroplanes whose mission would be to strike at enemy targets. He made his proposal at a time when most other French military thinkers, including Foch, totally deprecated the aeroplane's value as a weapon of war.[14]

In spite of their superior intelligence, Lanrezac, Pau and Ruffey were dismissed, whereas their colleagues, some of whom were less cerebral, performed better, at least in Joffre's opinion. Therefore, the conclusion must be that high intelligence does not guarantee competence in the field of martial leadership or in finding favour with superiors.

It might be expected that previous combat experience would assist a general to avoid costly mistakes on the battlefield. Of the ten army commanders, only Foch commanded troops in action for the first time in 1914.[15] Seven others had fought in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71;[16] two, Sarrail and Franchet d'Esperey, had waged war later in France's colonies.[17]

However, the veterans did not have an advantage over Foch because the Franco-Prussian War had ended forty-three years earlier, the seven participants had been junior officers with far fewer responsibilities, and the armies had been smaller and the firepower of their weapons far less explosive. As for the two generals who had served overseas in more recent years, they had encountered native tribesmen who possessed arms whose quality and quantity never came close to matching those of the French forces.[18] Since Foch, the novice in combat, retained his post while one-third of the veterans lost theirs, it is obvious that previous active participation in military conflicts does not necessarily mean that all experienced officers will perform well in every war. It did not help

Lanrezac, Pau and Ruffey to meet Joffre's expectations in 1914.

According to the late Field-Marshal Sir Archibald Wavell, good health is essential for a military leader because it helps him to withstand the pressures which war invariably inflicts on field commanders.[19] Of the ten generals in this study, only Foch suffered from a serious illness in 1914. He had a painful renal ailment, which was the result of a surfeit of horseback riding. When the war started, Foch no longer found time to indulge in his favourite form of recreation: the kidney trouble quickly disappeared, and he enjoyed excellent health afterward.[20] The other generals (with the possible exceptions of Ruffey and Maunoury, whose state of health is unknown) were hale and hearty.[21] Therefore, poor health was definitely not a reason for the alleged incompetence of Lanrezac and Pau; nor is it a credible explanation for the dismissal of Ruffey because no one has ever claimed that he felt unwell on the eve of the campaign.

Age is an important factor in successful generalship, for, in Wavell's words, "a good young general will usually beat a good old one."[22] The average age of the French army commanders in July 1914 was sixty-two years.[23] While they were not youthful, it should be recognized that the generals who commanded the three northernmost German armies were all sixty-eight years old.[24] The oldest French army commanders were the three recalled to active duty at the beginning of the war:

Pau and Maunoury were sixty-six, and de Langle was one year their junior. The last two men performed as well as their younger counterparts, but Joffre felt compelled to remove Pau. However, the Generalissimo also cashiered two of his younger subordinates. Since the dismissal rates were virtually the same for both younger and older army commanders, age could not have been a reason why the Commander-in-Chief replaced Lanrezac, Pau and Ruffey.

Captain S.W. Roskill asserts that successful leadership is largely a product of a person's education.[25] De Castelnau,[26] Dubail, de Langle, Lanrezac, Franchet d'Esperey, Pau and Sarrail had attended the military academy of Saint-Cyr. With the exception of de Langle, who became a cavalryman, all accepted commissions as infantry officers.[27] Ruffey, Maunoury and Foch[28] went to l'Ecole Polytechnique, the school for training military engineers and artillery officers, and then joined the artillery. Two of the limogés (Pau and Lanrezac) were Saint-Cyriens, whereas Ruffey was the lone Polytechnicien to be replaced in 1914. The rates of dismissal were approximately the same. Therefore, successful generalship did not depend on which school these commanders had attended as young men.

In Roskill's opinion, successful leaders should have a transcendental belief.[29] All ten army commanders (with the possible exceptions of Ruffey and Maunoury, whose personal convictions are unknown) believed in a power greater than

themselves. Sarrail, Dubail and Lanrezac were loyal republicans, and the others were devout Roman Catholics.[30] Pau was the sole Catholic to lose his command; Lanrezac, the lone republican. Although the dismissal rate was substantially higher for republicans, the numbers are too few to reach a definite conclusion as to whether or not religious belief played a more significant role than laicism in aiding these commanders to perform competently. It is possible to state, however, that having a strong belief in a cause greater than one's personal career goals, while helpful, is not a guarantee against failure, as Lanrezac and Pau discovered.

Personality conflicts between field commanders can undermine an army's ability to win wars.[31] This problem could have seriously affected the French Army because the officer corps, like most institutions in France, was deeply divided between republicans and Catholics.[32] However, animosity had rarely surfaced among the ten military leaders in this study before 1914. During his tenure as Inspector General of the Infantry, Sarrail, a staunch republican, had gone out of his way to help advance de Castelnau's career in spite of the latter's avowed, heart-felt religious convictions.[33]

The one overt personality conflict was that between Dubail and de Castelnau, but it had nothing to do with their religious or political beliefs. Upon Joffre's appointment as Chief of the General Staff, de Castlenau also became his Chief of Staff designate in the event of war. Dubail's resentment

of de Castelnau's appointment to a designated post which he himself had coveted resulted in a professional and personality conflict between them. The dispute eventually became noticeable, and Alexandre Millerand, the new Minister of War, resolved it by abolishing Dubail's post of Chief of Staff of the Army and giving him command of a corps in 1912.[34]

Fortunately, the two generals, whose armies fought side by side in 1914, forgot about their mutual dislike and co-operated completely. On August 23, Dubail ordered the Commander of the VIII Corps (the northernmost corps of the First Army) to make every effort to strike the left flank of the enemy in order to disengage the Second Army. The following day, de Castelnau telephoned Dubail, asking him to have the VIII Corps assist the XVI Corps (the southernmost corps of the Second Army) which expected to be attacked shortly; Dubail replied affirmatively and issued the appropriate instructions to the Commander of the VIII Corps. On September 1, de Castelnau ordered the Commander of the XVI Corps to employ all possible means to help the VIII Corps seize a hill because its capture would be of extreme importance for both the First and Second armies.[35]

These ten generals all lived up to de Langle's code of conduct in this matter: in wartime, a commander, however reluctant, accomplishes even the impossible to aid his neighbour.[36] Historians do not mention even one instance in which the army commanders revealed an unwillingness to co-

operate with one another. Therefore, Lanrezac, Pau and Ruffey were not dismissed for unco-operativeness.

Although Wavell considers bravery to be an important quality for a field commander to possess, he does not expect twentieth-century generals to lead their troops into battle; rather, Wavell regards physical courage as vital in "determining the degree of risk a commander will take to see for himself what is going on."[37] Two French army commanders did so during the campaign: on August 22, Lanrezac ventured near enough to the front lines to observe a battle;[38] and six days later, de Langle visited the soldiers of one of his corps because he believed that his presence near the battlefield would raise the morale of the troops.[39] While these are the only two known examples of physical courage on the part of French army commanders during the campaign, no one has ever claimed that the others displayed physical fear of the enemy.[40] Therefore, cowardice could not have been the reason why Lanrezac, Pau and Ruffey were among the limogés.

According to Wavell, a competent general must have a good understanding of logistics.[41] The AFGG clearly shows that nine of the French army commanders made sure that their troops had adequate food and munitions during the campaign.[42] The exception was Sarrail who never dispatched an order in which he referred to supplies. However, as Commander of the VI Corps of the Third Army prior to August 30, he issued the appropriate instructions to ensure that his soldiers were

fed.[43] A lack of understanding of logistics, therefore, was not the cause of the dismissal of Lanrezac, Pau and Ruffey.

Wavell believes that a mastery of strategy and tactics is perhaps the least significant factor in good generalship. Nevertheless, he acknowledges the necessity for a field commander to know how to manoeuvre his units effectively and formulate appropriate plans to defeat his opponent.[44] The ten army commanders (with the possible exception of Maunoury, for whom information is unavailable) were first-class strategists and tacticians, and all of them had previously commanded a division (the smallest unit of combined arms) or a corps.[45] Moreover, Dubail, de Castelnau, Ruffey, de Langle and Lanrezac (all of whom were members of the Supreme War Council by April 1914) knew they would lead the First, Second, Third, Fourth and Fifth armies, respectively, in the event of war. When hostilities commenced in August, each directed the army to which he had previously been designated.[46] Consequently, they had had adequate time to familiarize themselves with their units, which rules out last-minute changes in personnel assignments as a possible excuse for the alleged incompetence of Lanrezac and Ruffey.

CONCLUSIONS

Information about certain of Ruffey and Maunoury's qualities and skills is unavailable and, therefore, cannot be discussed further, except to state that no one has ever accused them of having lacked good health, a strong

transcendental belief, and, in the case of Maunoury, expertise in strategy and tactics.

The evidence reveals that all the army commanders for whom information is available were intelligent, robust, co-operative, brave, and competent in logistics and strategy. Differences in age, educational background, personal convictions, and previous combat experiences (or absence of them) were irrelevant factors to their generalship during the summer of 1914. Based solely on the ten aforementioned qualities and abilities, all the army commanders deserved to hold the positions they occupied in August and September 1914. However, contrary to Joffre's expectations, Lanrezac, Pau and Ruffey had to be removed shortly after the start of hostilities. Since the Generalissimo must have had different but valid reasons for doing so, it will be useful to analyze the ten army commanders' judgment in order to discover if they exercised this essential quality of generalship from August 20 to September 5, 1914, and whether the Commander-in-Chief's evaluations of his subordinates' suitability for higher command were invariably right.

NOTES TO CHAPTER I

[1] For an outstanding analysis of Anglo-French diplomatic relations from the signing of the Entente Cordiale to the Agadir Crisis, see Samuel R. Williamson, The Politics of Grand Strategy: Britain and France Prepare for War, 1904-1914 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1969), pp. 1-88, 115-166.

[2] For in-depth accounts of the appointment of Joffre as Chief of the French General Staff and Messimy's reforms, see Joffre, Mémoires, I, pp. 7-12; Douglas Porch, The March to the Marne: The French Army 1871-1914 (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 169-190; Henry Contamine, La Revanche 1871-1914 (Paris: Editions Berger-Levrault, 1957), pp. 117-127; Ralston, The Army of the Republic, pp. 319-343; Prete, "Coalition Warfare," pp. 5-17.

[3] Joffre, Mémoires, I, pp. 12-13, 300-301, 308-313; Contamine, La Revanche, p. 155; Ralston, The Army of the Republic, pp. 334-337; Gabriel Hanotaux, La Bataille de la Marne. Tome I: 25 Août-7 Septembre 1914 (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1922), pp. 10-15; Prete, "Coalition Warfare," pp. 20-21.

[4] Porch, The March to the Marne, pp. 191-212; Contamine, La Revanche, pp. 130, 141-142, 150-151; Ralston, The Army of the Republic, pp. 343-371.

The Three-Year Service Law increased the number of French infantry divisions to seventy-four in 1914, which still left the French with eight divisions fewer than their German opponent. However, since the British and Belgians contributed four and six divisions, respectively, the Allies outnumbered the Germans, in August 1914, by two divisions--eighty-four to eighty-two. See Général Maurice Gamelin, Manoeuvre et Victoire de la Marne (Paris: Editions Bernard Grasset, 1954), pp. 26-31; Contamine, La Revanche, pp. 198-207; Prete, "Coalition Warfare," p. 155 and 155 n. 42.

[5] Joffre, Mémoires, I, pp. 107-108; Williamson, The Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 180-182, 208-209; Prete, "Coalition Warfare," pp. 25-29.

[6] Paul G. Halpern, The Mediterranean Naval Situation, 1908-1914 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 86-149; Williamson, The Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 227-299, 318-327.

[7] For two excellent appraisals of the Schlieffen Plan and Moltke's modifications of it, see Gerhard Ritter, The Sword and the Scepter: The Problem of Militarism in Germany. Volume II: The European Powers and the Wilhelminian Empire,

1890-1914 (Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami Press, 1970), pp. 193-220; Jehuda L. Wallach, The Dogma of the Battle of Annihilation: The Theories of Clausewitz and Schlieffen and Their Impact on the German Conduct of Two World Wars (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1986), pp. 54-60, 87-114.

[8] Joffre, Mémoires, I, pp. 129-132, 26-27, 150-160; Williamson, The Politics of Grand Strategy, pp. 208-223. The inability of the Council of National Defence to predict Britain's probable course of action in the event of war and Joffre's decision not to include the BEF in Plan XVII are important because they reveal French mistrust of the British: the Entente Cordiale could not erase centuries of Anglo-French rivalry in only ten years. This lack of trust affected even Anglophiles, and it had serious repercussions for Allied military co-operation during the summer of 1914, for Lanrezac, an Anglophobe, commanded one of the armies which fought directly beside the BEF. See Prete, "Coalition Warfare," pp. 66-70 for a more detailed discussion of French attitudes towards the British.

[9] Joffre, Mémoires, I, pp. 138-203.

[10] James L. Stokesbury, "Leadership as an Art," in James H. Buck and Lawrence J. Korb (ed.), Military Leadership (Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1981), p. 40.

[11] James F. Dunnigan, How to Make War: A Comprehensive Guide to Modern War (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1982), p. 221.

[12] Sarrail graduated third in his class of 345 students at Saint-Cyr. Jan Karl Tanenbaum, General Maurice Sarrail, 1856-1929: The French Army and Left-Wing Politics (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1974), p. 12. De Castelnau entered Saint-Cyr near the top of his class. Giraud, Castelnau, p. 5. Franchet d'Esperey graduated sixth in his class of 413 students at Saint-Cyr. Général Paul Azan, Franchet d'Esperey (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1949), p. 12. Foch finished third in his class at l'Ecole d'Application d'Artillerie. Major-General Sir George Aston, The Biography of the Late Marshal Foch (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1929), p. 50; Captain Basil Henry Liddell Hart, Foch: The Man of Orleans (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1933), p. 14; Lieutenant-Colonel T.M. Hunter, Marshal Foch: A Study in Leadership (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1961), p. 15. A more recent biographer of Foch claims that the latter finished fourth. See General Sir James Marshall-Cornwall, Foch as Military Commander (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1972), p. 7. Major (later General) Maurice Gamelin, one of Joffre's staff officers in 1914, attested to

the intelligence of Dubail and Maunoury. Gamelin, Manoeuvre, pp. 96, 101. De Langle's intelligence impressed Franchet d'Esperey who wrote the preface to de Langle's memoirs. De Langle, Souvenirs, p. 7.

[13]Joffre, Mémoires, I, pp. 204, 142, 11, 205.

[14]Gamelin, Manoeuvre, p. 97; Contamine, La Victoire, p. 133; Tuchman, The Guns of August, p. 239.

[15]John Keegan and Andrew Wheatcroft, Who's Who in Military History From 1453 to the present day (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson), p. 119.

[16]The following generals served in the Franco-Prussian War: Pau: Tuchman, The Guns of August, p. 125; Lanrezac: Georges Beau and Léopold Gaubusseau, En Août 1914 Lanrezac a-t-il Sauvé la France? (Paris: Presses de la Cité, 1964), p. 20; de Castelnau: Giraud, Castelnau, pp. 8-9; de Langle: Franchet d'Esperey's "Préface" in de Langle, Souvenirs, p. 7; Dubail and Maunoury: Holger H. Herwig and Neil M. Heyman, Biographical Dictionary of World War I (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1982), pp. 134, 245. It is not known if Ruffey ever saw action. However, he was in the same class as Joffre at l'Ecole Polytechnique. Since that entire class fought in the defence of Paris (see Marshall-Cornwall, Foch, p.6), Ruffey probably participated in the Franco-Prussian War.

[17] Sarrail served in North Africa from 1877 to 1883. Tanenbaum, Sarrail, p. 13. Franchet d'Esperey saw action in Tunisia and Indo-China during the 1880s, and in Morocco in 1912-1913. Azan, Franchet d'Esperey, pp. 15-21, 51-76.

[18] Maréchal Ferdinand Foch, Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de la guerre 1914-1918. Tome Premier (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1931), p. 15.

[19] Field-Marshal Sir Archibald Wavell, Soldiers and Soldiering or Epithets of War (London: Jonathan Cape, 1953), pp. 14-15.

[20]Aston, Foch, pp. 50-51; Liddell Hart, Foch, pp. 14-15; Général Maxim Weygand, Foch (Paris: Flammarion, 1947), p. 15.

[21] The following generals enjoyed good health: Pau: Joffre, Mémoires, I, p. 255; de Langle and Dubail: Tuchman, The Guns of August, pp. 240, 182; Sarrail: Tanenbaum, Sarrail, p. 9; Lanrezac: Beau and Gaubusseau, Lanrezac, p. 73; de Castelnau: Giraud, Castelnau, p. 24; Franchet d'Esperey: Azan, Franchet d'Esperey, p. 45.

[22]Wavell, Soldiers, p. 19; Alfred Vagts, "Age and Field

Command." Military Affairs, VI (Spring 1942), p. 13.

[23]Sarrail was 58: Tanenbaum, Sarrail, p. 10; Foch, 62: Marshall-Cornwall, Foch, p. 1; Lanrezac, 62: Beau and Gaubusseau, Lanrezac, p. 18; de Castelnau, 62: Giraud, Castelnau, p. 24; Franchet d'Esperey, 58: Azan, Franchet d'Esperey, p. 10; Pau, 66: Keegan and Wheatcroft, Who's Who in Military History, p. 259; Dubail, de Langle and Maunoury were 63, 65 and 66, respectively: Herwig and Heyman, Biographical Dictionary, pp. 134, 219, 245. Ruffey's exact age is unavailable, but he was in the same class as Joffre at l'Ecole Polytechnique. Since Joffre was 62 in July 1914, Ruffey was probably between 61 and 63 years of age.

[24]Vagts, "Age and Field Command," pp. 16-17.

[25]Captain S.W. Roskill, The Art of Leadership (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1965), p. 12.

[26]De Castelnau's studies at Saint-Cyr were interrupted by the Franco-Prussian War. He never returned for the second and final year of the program because he did not believe that institution could teach him anything more of value. De Castelnau became an infantry officer. Giraud, Castelnau, pp. 11, 18.

[27] Sarrail: Tanenbaum, Sarrail, pp. 12-13; Franchet d'Esperey: Azan, Franchet d' Esperey, p. 12; Lanrezac: Beau and Gaubusseau, Lanrezac, pp. 20-21; de Langle: Franchet d'Esperey's "Préface" in de Langle, Souvenirs, p. 7; Pau: Keegan and Wheatcroft, Who's Who in Military History, p. 259; Dubail: Herwig and Heyman, Biographical Dictionary, p. 134.

[28]Foch did not complete the second and final year of his program because of the desperate need for artillery officers. Marshall-Cornwall, Foch, p. 6; Ruffey: Marshall-Cornwall, Foch, p. 6; Maunoury: Herwig and Heyman, Biographical Dictionary, p. 245.

[29]Roskill, The Art of Leadership, pp. 15-16; Stokesbury, "Leadership as an Art," pp. 34-36.

[30]Sarrail: Tanenbaum, Sarrail, p. 13; Lanrezac: Beau and Gaubusseau, Lanrezac, p. 32; Dubail: Gamelin, Manoeuvre, p. 96; Foch: Marshall-Cornwall, Foch, pp. 1-2; Pau: Porch, The March to the Marne, p. 172; Franchet d'Esperey: Azan, Franchet d'Esperey, p. 282; de Langle: de Langle, Souvenirs, p. 140; de Castelnau: Herwig and Heyman, Biographical Dictionary, p. 111.

[31]Geoffrey Regan, Someone Had Blundered... A Historical Survey of Military Incompetence (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd.,

1987), pp. 45-56.

[32]William Serman, Les Officiers Français dans la Nation (1848-1914) (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1982), p. 84.

[33]Contamine, La Victoire, p. 191.

[34]Joffre, Mémoires, I, pp. 12, 27-28; Ralston, The Army of the Republic, p. 336; Porch, The March to the Marne, p. 171. Barbara Tuchman claims that the conflict between de Castelnau and Dubail was one of unknown origin (see Tuchman, The Guns of August, p. 182), but her statement is erroneous.

[35]AFGG, T1: 1 (A) no. 1060; T1: 2 (A1) nos. 191, 175; T1: 2 (A2) no. 1817; Général Auguste Dubail, Quatre Années de Commandement 1914-1918: Journal de Campagne. Tome Premier: I Armée (Paris: L. Fournier, 1920), pp. 62-63, 66.

[36]De Langle, Souvenirs, p. 150.

[37]Wavell, Soldiers, pp. 17-18.

[38] Major-General Sir Edward Spears, Liaison 1914: A Narrative of the Great Retreat. Second Edition (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1968), p. 151; Robert B. Asprey, The First Battle of the Marne (New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1962), p. 53; Tuchman, The Guns of August, p. 250.

[39]De Langle, Souvenirs, pp. 145-146.

[40] Carl von Clausewitz, the famous nineteenth-century Prussian military theorist, believed that courage is the most important quality for soldiers to possess because they are often in peril on the battlefield. See Carl von Clausewitz, On War. Volume I (New York: Barnes & Noble Inc., 1968), pp. 47-48.

Like Jomini, Clausewitz wrote primarily for future supreme commanders. It must be pointed out that when On War first appeared in 1832, generals of that time ventured closer to the actual battlefield, and, therefore, bravery was a more significant quality than it became later. By 1914, it was no longer necessary for a general to expose himself to enemy fire because improvements in communications enabled him to remain in contact with his subordinates without ever having to go near the battlefield. However, that does not mean that French generals, including army commanders, lacked valour during World War I. Franchet d'Esperey proved his physical courage on August 29 when, as a corps commander, he led his men into battle. Spears, Liaison, p. 272; Asprey, The First Battle, p. 78; Contamine, La Victoire, p. 201. Maunoury suffered a serious wound in one eye during a visit to the front in March 1915. Herwig and Heyman, Biographical Dictionary, p. 246.

Among the division commanders, Henri Pétain and Louis de Maud'huy displayed exceptional courage during the Great Retreat and the Battle of the Marne. For Pétain's bravery, see Henri Isselin, The Battle of the Marne, p. 165; for de Maud'huy's valour, see Georges Blond, The Marne, p. 147.

[41]Wavell, Soldiers, p. 14; Stokesbury, "Leadership as an Art," p. 37.

[42]See the AFGG, T1: 1 (A) no. 650 for Pau; no. 826 for de Castelnau; no. 862 for de Langle; T1: 2 (A1) no. 433 for Ruffey; no. 858 for Dubail; no. 1255 for Lanrezac; T1: 2 (A2) no. 1686 for Maunoury; no. 1699 for Foch; no. 2524 for Franchet d'Esperey.

[43]Ibid., T1: 1 (A) no. 1171.

[44]Wavell, Soldiers, pp. 22, 14.

[45]See Joffre, Mémoires, I, pp. 13, 36, 38, 205 and 271 for his favourable opinion of the skills of Foch, Dubail, de Langle, Ruffey, Pau, de Castelnau and Lanrezac, respectively. For Franchet d'Esperey's abilities, see Azan, Franchet d'Esperey, pp. 45-46; for Sarrail's capabilities, see Tanenbaum, Sarrail, pp. 32-33.

See Gothaischer Genealogischer Hofkalender Nebst Diplomatisch - Statistischem Jahrbuche (Gotha, Germany: Justus Perthes, 1900-1912, 1914, 1917) for the ten generals' previous postings as division or corps commanders. For Ruffey, Franchet d'Esperey, de Langle, Sarrail, Foch, Lanrezac and Maunoury, see Jahrbuch 1912, pp. 716-718; for de Castelnau and Dubail, see Jahrbuch 1911, p. 726; for Pau, see Jahrbuch 1909, p. 692.

[46]Joffre, Mémoires, I, pp. 203-205.

De Langle reached retirement age in July 1914 and was replaced as a member of the Supreme War Council. However, he remained as the designated Commander of the Fourth Army because the "July Crisis" which eventually led to World War I was already in progress, and Joffre considered it unwise to make a last-minute personnel change of such magnitude.

CHAPTER II

THE JUDGMENT OF THE TEN FRENCH ARMY COMMANDERS DURING THE BATTLE OF THE FRONTIERS AND THE GREAT RETREAT

Famous generals are usually remembered for their brilliant tactics which produced impressive victories on the battlefield, even though they and their nations sometimes suffered defeat in the long run. Historians still extol the military leadership of men such as Hannibal, Napoleon I, and Douglas MacArthur. Compared with the aforementioned leaders, the ten French army commanders of 1914 seem mediocre. Nevertheless, the majority of them did demonstrate the one vital quality of good generalship--sound judgment--that officers of their high rank must exercise.

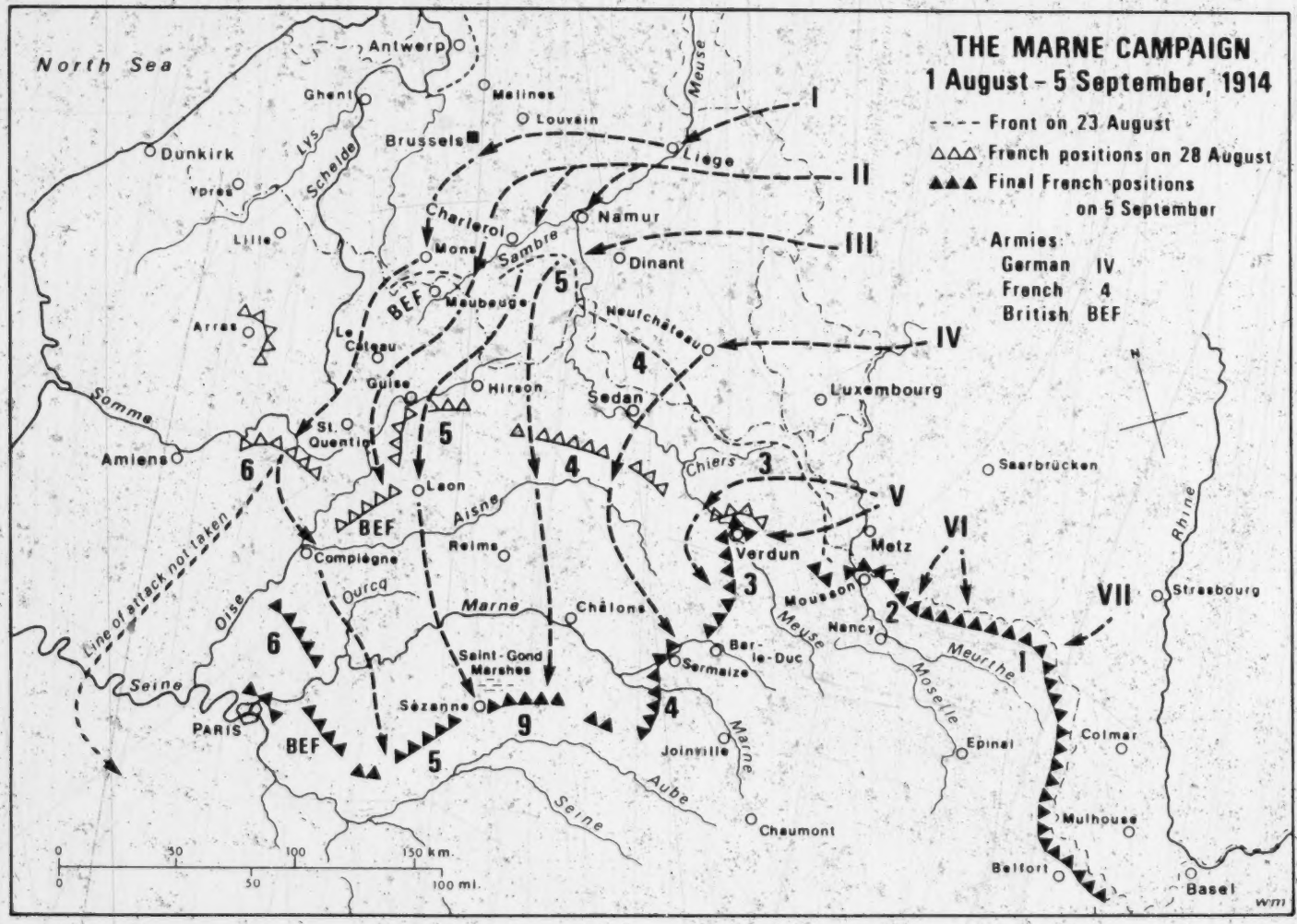
According to William J. Wood, judgment can be defined as general's capacity to assess all known factors accurately, make a sensible decision about how to accomplish his goal, and execute it.[1]

In this study, an evaluation of the army commanders' judgment will be based on whether or not they made the right decision(s) in each given situation whose circumstances involved more than the need to order advances or retreats. Therefore, many of the examples used are extraordinary, and have been commented upon by historians and/or by the army commanders' contemporaries.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE FIGHTING IN FRANCE AND BELGIUM

Joffre informed the army commanders in the southern sector of their missions on August 8. Dubail's First Army was to enter Alsace and march towards the city of Sarrebourg, while de Castelnau's Second Army was to move into German Lorraine and advance towards the city of Saarbrücken.[2] During the afternoon of the same day, the French captured the Alsatian city of Mulhouse, but the Germans retook it thirty-six hours later. A concerned Joffre immediately decided to create the Seventh Army, or "Army of Alsace," to protect Dubail's right wing during his impending offensive. Its commander was General Pau, whom Joffre selected from the list of retired senior officers.[3]

The French launched their all-out offensive into Alsace and German Lorraine on August 14. The German Seventh (General Josias von Heeringen) and Sixth (Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria) armies faced the French First and Second armies, respectively. When the French approached the district of Morhange on August 18, the Germans stopped their fighting withdrawal and stood firm. The Army of Alsace, which found itself virtually unopposed, recaptured Mulhouse the following day. On August 20, the armies of Rupprecht and Heeringen counter-attacked, forcing de Castelnau and Dubail to retreat to le Grand Couronné de Nancy (the fortified heights in the region near the city of Nancy, which henceforth will be referred to as "the Couronné") and the Meurthe River.[4] Two


THE MARNE CAMPAIGN
1 August – 5 September, 1914
Front on 23 August
French positions on 28 August
Final French positions on 5 September
Armies:
German IV
French 4
British BEF
North Sea
Antwerp
Ghent
Malines
Louvain
Brussels
Liège
Meuse
Dunkirk
Lys
Scheldt
Ypres
Lille
Arras
Charleroi
Mons
Sambre
Namur
Dinant
Maubeuge
Le Cateau
Neufchâteau
Luxembourg
Somme
St. Quentin
Guise
Hirson
Sedan
Amiens
Chiers
Saarbrücken
Rhine
Laon
Aisne
Verdun
Metz
Compiègne
Reims
Ourcq
Marne
Châlons
Mouzon
Nancy
Strasbourg
Oise
Line of attack not taken
Bar-le-Duc
Meuse
Meurthe
Seine
Saint-Gond Marshes
Sézanne
Sermaize
Moselle
PARIS
Joinville
Epinal
Colmar
Aube
Chaumont
Mulhouse
Belfort
Basel
0 50 100 150 km.
0 50 100 mi.
wm

days later, Rupprecht persuaded Moltke to allow him to keep advancing because he suspected (erroneously, as it turned out) that the enemy was on the verge of total disintegration.[5]

The rejuvenated French First and Second armies commenced a counter-offensive on August 24, which obliged the surprised enemy to retreat during the next four days. The intensity of the fighting diminished somewhat until September 4, and Joffre took advantage of the relative calm in Alsace and French Lorraine to transfer one corps each from Dubail and the de Castelnau in order to reinforce other French armies farther west.[6] Rupprecht and Heeringen committed their armies to violent assaults during the next two days, but their efforts to break through were in vain, for Dubail and de Castelnau's troops, although outnumbered, occupied strong defensive positions.[7]

In the central sector, le Grand Quartier Général (French Army Headquarters, which henceforth will be referred to as "Supreme Headquarters") began to receive unconfirmed reports of German incursions into eastern Belgium on August 2, and Joffre responded by moving the Fifth Army slightly northward and inserting the Fourth Army (his reserve) into the line between it and the Third Army.[8] Six days later, the Generalissimo ordered Ruffey, de Langle and Lanrezac to advance into the Ardennes.[9] However, the first indications of the strength and scope of the German right wing became apparent on August 15, and Joffre instructed Lanrezac to

occupy positions between the Sambre and Meuse rivers in Belgium in crder to strike the enemy's right flank.[10]

Since this strategy reduced the number of his forces in the Ardennes, the Chief of the General Staff decided to double the size of the Fourth Army and use it as the principal unit in the offensive he was about to launch. To guard the right flank of the Third Army from a potential German assault from the fortresses around Metz, Joffre formed the "Army of Lorraine," or Eighth Army, on August 21. It was commanded by Maunoury, whom the Generalissimo had recalled from retirement.[11]

The French launched their offensive on August 22. The German Fifth (Crown Prince Wilhelm) and Fourth (Duke Albrecht of Württemberg) armies faced the French Third and Fourth armies, respectively. The French sustained an enormous number of casualties before withdrawing. Three days later, the French Fourth Army occupied positions on the south bank of the Meuse, while the Third Army was helping to defend the city of Verdun. De Langle and Ruffey launched a counter-offensive on August 26, which pushed the surprised Germans back.

The French Third and Fourth armies held the Germans in check until Joffre ordered them to withdraw on August 31.[12] The retreat continued until September 5 when the Generalissimo instructed de Langle, Sarrail (who had replaced Ruffey on August 30) and Foch[13] to contain the German offensive in their sectors, while the Fifth and Sixth armies and the BEF launched

the decisive counter-offensive against the enemy's right wing.[14]

In the northern sector, Lanrezac's Fifth Army reached the Sambre and Meuse rivers near the Belgian city of Charleroi on August 20. General Karl von Bülow's German Second Army launched a frontal assault against the French Fifth Army the following day, which succeeded in slowly pushing Lanrezac's units southward. General Max von Hausen's German Third Army reached the Meuse on August 23, posing a threat to the right flank of the Fifth Army. Meanwhile, to Lanrezac's left, General Alexander von Kluck's German First Army was engaging the BEF near the city of Mons. The next day, Bülow ordered Kluck (his subordinate) to attack Lanrezac's left flank, and asked Hausen to assault the right flank of the French Fifth Army. Due to a lack of co-ordination among these three German generals, Bülow's planned decisive blow failed completely: it hit a vacuum because Lanrezac had already withdrawn, which had obliged the BEF to follow suit. The Germans gained only a tactical victory at Charleroi, for the Allied armies remained intact and combative.[15]

On August 25, Joffre, who now recognized the folly of Plan XVII, instructed Huffey, de Langle, Lanrezac and Sir John French to retreat towards Verdun and the Somme River, from where a counter-stroke would be launched.[16] To reinforce his hard-pressed left wing, the Generalissimo disbanded the Seventh and Eighth armies two days later, and sent most of

their units to join the newly created Sixth Army. This force took up positions to the left of the BEF, and was commanded by Maunoury.[17]

While Joffre was strengthening his left, Moltke, believing the campaign to be virtually over, weakened his right wing by diverting two corps to East Prussia in order to defend it against the invading Russians.[18]

Joffre ordered Lanrezac to counter-attack both the German First and Second armies in order to give the British a much needed respite. The French Fifth Army pushed the enemy back near the town of Guise on August 29, with the result that the stunned German Second Army remained stationary for thirty-six hours, thus allowing Lanrezac's troops and the BEF to retreat unopposed.[19]

On August 30, Bülow asked Kluck (the latter was no longer the former's subordinate) to help him destroy the French Fifth Army by turning south-eastwardly and attacking Lanrezac's flank on the following day. Kluck agreed to Bülow's request. Since the German Second Army did not advance on August 31, it was a twenty-four hour march behind the First Army. Moltke instructed Kluck to follow Bülow in echelon in order to protect the latter's right wing from a possible flank attack by the French Sixth Army. Kluck, who wanted to avoid doing nothing while he waited for Bülow to pass him, believed his forces were the only ones whose location afforded the opportunity of outflanking the French Fifth Army. He decided,

without consulting Moltke, to continue moving southward with four corps, while stationing one on the right bank of the Marne to check the French Sixth Army. The Commander of the German First Army did not consider his actions to be insubordinate: he genuinely believed that he was doing what his Commander-in-Chief wanted--enveloping the French Fifth Army east of Paris.[20]

By September 3, Kluck's exposed right flank made an inviting target for the French Sixth Army. Meanwhile, Joffre, realizing that the time was approaching for a counter-offensive, dismissed Lanrezac and replaced him with the (supposedly) more aggressive Franchet d'Esperey.[21]

The following day, Moltke suspected an enemy counter-attack was imminent due to the transfer of several French corps from east to west and the French Sixth Army's movements near Paris. He ordered Kluck and Bülow to go over to the defensive because they lacked the strength, in his opinion, to destroy their opponents, while the other five German armies attempted to bring the campaign to a victorious conclusion elsewhere. When Kluck received this order the following day, he thought his Commander-in-Chief had been the victim of inaccurate intelligence information. Therefore, the Commander of the First Army decided on his own to keep pursuing the French Fifth Army.[22]

On September 4, Joffre instructed Maunoury to leave Paris the following morning. The Commander of the Sixth Army was

to cross the Ourcq River on September 6; then he, Franchet d'Esperey, Foch and Sir John French would counter-attack the Germans.[23] As Maunoury's troops moved eastward on September 5, one of Kluck's corps was probing towards the west. The two forces collided unexpectedly, with the Germans forcing the French to retreat a short distance before they themselves withdrew under cover of darkness.[24]

THE JUDGMENT OF THE TEN ARMY COMMANDERS

Pau seldom had to make important decisions due to the relative quiet in his sector of operations. When Joffre finally obliged the Commander of the Army of Alsace to do so, the latter implicitly refused. During the morning of August 22, the Generalissimo sent a telegram to Pau, in which he stated that maintaining the French presence in Mulhouse must be subordinated to the necessities of military priorities in other sectors, and it would be left to the Commander of the Army of Alsace to decide whether or not to withdraw from the city. One of Pau's subordinates later telephoned Supreme Headquarters and told an officer of the difficulties his troops were experiencing in trying to feed the 300,000 citizens of Mulhouse. He also asserted that occupying the city was preventing the Army of Alsace from conducting military operations elsewhere. The caller terminated the conversation by saying that this information had been

communicated to enlighten Joffre and facilitate his resolution of the problem.[25]

Based on the limited available evidence, it seems that Dubail displayed sound judgment throughout the Battle of the Frontiers and the Great Retreat. Joffre ordered the Commander of the First Army to align his left wing with de Castelnau's right wing on August 20; however, Dubail had already anticipated his Commander-in-Chief's instructions: as soon as the former had learned of the withdrawal of the XV and XVI corps of the Second Army, he drew back his VIII and XIII corps.[26]

On September 2, one of de Castelnau's officers informed Dubail that the Commander of the Second Army envisaged the distinct possibility of a withdrawal beyond the Moselle. The officer asked the Commander of the First Army to contemplate the same course of action. The latter refused to consider the idea and instructed the officer to advise de Castelnau to make every effort to maintain his present positions, for a retreat would have disastrous consequences for France. The Commander of the Second Army held his ground.[27]

De Castelnau seemed to have displayed a lack of sound judgment on three other occasions. The first incident occurred on August 20. According to Henri Isselin, the Commander of the Second Army possessed enough tactical skill not to have his troops charge wildly towards the German positions. However, on the morning of the first day of the

Battle of the Frontiers, he appeared to adopt the mood of euphoria which was extant at Supreme Headquarters, and anticipated a relatively easy penetration of the German lines.[28] After the battering the Second Army had received in the morning, de Castelnau commanded a retreat behind the Meurthe in order to re-organize his units.[29] Joffre did not express an opinion on whether or not the retreat was necessary, but de Castelnau's fellow generals as well as historians agreed that the Commander of the Second Army had had no other choice.[30] Therefore, de Castelnau made an extremely sagacious decision.

The second possible occurrence took place at 11:45 on the following day, when de Castelnau told Joffre that the Second Army might be able to resist the enemy for twenty-four hours, and, if so, he would attempt to counter-attack on August 23. If another withdrawal were to prove necessary, de Castelnau proposed to retire towards the Meuse. Joffre sent a liaison officer to Second Army Headquarters, with a message that it was indispensable for de Castelnau's troops to maintain their positions around Nancy for another twenty-four hours; otherwise, civilian morale would drastically suffer and the success of the other French armies' impending offensives farther westward might be jeopardized. At 22:20, a liaison officer relayed a message by telephone from de Castelnau to Supreme Headquarters, advising Joffre of the improvement in the Second Army's material and moral situation. According to

the officer, the Germans had advanced only a short distance, and no one, including de Castelnau, spoke any longer of retreating beyond the Moselle.[31] It seems that de Castelnau lacked good judgment, albeit briefly, on August 21.

The last time the Commander of the Second Army appeared to be less than sagacious was on September 5. At 14:40, he told Supreme Headquarters that his soldiers had been withstanding a German onslaught since the previous evening. De Castelnau cited the enemy's artillery superiority as the cause of a possible short-lived French resistance on the Couronné. He foresaw a choice between two courses of action if the Germans continued to press the Second Army seriously: he could resist on the spot and end up with a small number of exhausted troops whose future effectiveness would be severely limited, or he could slip away in time to occupy better defensive positions farther south. De Castelnau expressed a preference for the latter alternative. Joffre did not reply until the following afternoon. While the Generalissimo wanted his subordinate to stay put, he agreed to accept a retreat, provided it was absolutely necessary.[32]

It appears as though the commander of the Second Army fell victim to a short period of unsound judgment, but he accepted Joffre's preference as an order, held his ground, and even resumed the offensive on September 6.[33]

Based on the limited available evidence, it appears that Ruffey made only one mistake in judgment during the campaign:

He underestimated his adversary before the Battle of the Frontiers. According to Henry Contamine, the Commander of the Third Army already imagined the establishment of his new headquarters in Luxembourg as early as August 20.[34] Barbara Tuchman, on the other hand, denies Ruffey's overconfidence. She argues that the Commander of the Third Army paid closer attention than de Langle to the reports of the Belgian peasants who warned them of the large number of German units in the region.[35] Her statement contains some truth, but it is misleading, for, while de Langle never mentioned the peasants' information in his daily intelligence reports to Supreme Headquarters, Ruffey did so only once. On August 20, he wrote that the local farmers believed the Germans were moving away from his front to reinforce enemy units in western Belgium.[36] The following evening, the Commander of the Third Army still thought that only minor enemy detachments opposed his troops.[37] When Ruffey launched his offensive less than twelve hours later, the massive German presence in the area surprised him, but this should not have been the case because of all the warnings he had received from the Belgian peasants.[38]

The debate over Ruffey's judgment on August 20-21 is not easy to resolve. Tuchman's evidence is accurate, but only because de Langle remained totally unconcerned by any intelligence reports which indicated circumspection was preferable to an all-out offensive. However, the AFGG shows that Ruffey's optimism was justified because the Belgian

peasants had informed him that the enemy opposite the Third Army was in transit. Contamine's statement of the farmers' incessant warnings cannot be dismissed, however. It is possible that Ruffey believed but ignored most of the intelligence reports given to him. Finally, he received one that was both accurate and acceptable. The Commander of the Third Army probably seized on this piece of information because it fit perfectly with the optimistic "picture" of the upcoming offensive that he had already formed in his own mind.

On August 24, Ruffey asked Joffre to instruct Maunoury to assist the Third Army by using all the troops he could spare to launch an immediate offensive against the German left flank. The Generalissimo obviously trusted his subordinate's judgment, for he replied that Ruffey was closer to the front, and, therefore, the Commander of the Third Army and Maunoury should take the appropriate measures to deal with the situation.[39]

The limited available evidence seems to indicate that Sarrail always demonstrated good judgment during his tenure as Commander of the Third Army. On September 2, Joffre instructed Sarrail to withdraw to Joinville, a town approximately eighty kilometers south of Verdun, where the Third Army could gain a respite from the relentless German pressure before resuming the offensive. Sarrail complied, but only partially. Since he did not want to surrender the fortresses of Verdun, he kept his right wing in contact with

that city and pulled back his left wing to maintain liaison with the retreating Fourth Army.[40]

The limited available evidence seems to indicate that de Langle's judgment was generally sound, but by no means flawless. Both historians and contemporaries have commented upon his impatience prior to the Battle of the Frontiers. According to Barbara Tuchman, the Commander of the Fourth Army's enthusiasm remained undampened on August 20 by reports of strong German forces in the vicinity, for he was "aching to leap" into action.[41] In his memoirs, Major (later General) Maurice Gamelin, one of Joffre's staff officers, claims that de Langle became completely imbued with the optimism espoused by Supreme Headquarters and telephoned General Emile-Eugène Belin, Joffre's Chief of Staff, to express his desire to cease attacking only after final victory had been achieved.[42]

The AFGG confirms the reports of de Langle's eagerness. At 13:10, a liaison officer attached to the Fourth Army telephoned his superiors at Supreme Headquarters, advising them that several large German columns were marching across de Langle's sector. The officer asked whether the Fourth Army should wait for the enemy to attack or launch its own pre-emptive strike. Joffre returned the call two hours later. The Generalissimo stated that he understood de Langle's impatience, but he thought it was too early to engage the Germans, for they might be trying to provoke a piecemeal offensive, and the Fourth Army should avoid falling into their

trap.[43]

De Langle's reasoning had some merit: an immediate flank attack may have been preferable to remaining stationary for two more days (while the Germans were turning towards the Fourth Army) and then advancing in a frontal assault. However, Joffre's fear of having one of his armies trapped while attacking prematurely was reasonable, and de Langle obeyed his orders.

On August 31, the Commander of the Fourth Army informed Supreme Headquarters that the II Corps had experienced a slight setback, but was ready to retake the offensive the following day. Joffre replied that he failed to see any advantage to be gained, in light of the present situation, by conducting such an operation because the difficult terrain virtually precluded success. The next day, the Generalissimo criticized de Langle for having stationed too many units on the Fourth Army's right wing. Since this inappropriate alignment made manoeuvres impossible, he instructed de Langle to disperse some more of his units towards the west.[44]

With the exception of these three occasions, de Langle demonstrated sound judgment. He advised Joffre of the possibility of his troops having to withdraw towards the Chiers and Meuse rivers on August 23. The Generalissimo replied that the Fourth Army faced only three German corps and, therefore, it had to resume its offensive. De Langle obeyed, but his efforts ended in failure. The next morning,

he made Joffre aware that the Fourth Army was fighting six German corps and that fact had been the cause of its inability to advance. De Langle considered a retreat behind the Chiers and the Meuse to be essential; there, his troops could adequately defend themselves, regroup and prepare to retake the offensive in the near future. Although the Commander-in-Chief was displeased with his subordinate's suggestion, he authorized the withdrawal because he knew de Langle was not prone to exaggeration.[45]

The Commander of the Fourth Army deliberately disobeyed Joffre's orders on August 25, but, fortunately for him, his disobedience produced a beneficial result. He ignored the Generalissimo's instructions to keep retreating, and resolved, without consulting Supreme Headquarters, not to let the Germans cross the Meuse unopposed. Instead, de Langle placed every available unit along the left bank of the river, and the Fourth Army checked the enemy's advance.[46] Two days later, de Langle told Supreme Headquarters that the Fourth Army would need the support of Ruffey's troops to exploit the success obtained earlier that day. Joffre agreed with his subordinate's assessment.[47]

Although de Langle opposed the Generalissimo's order of August 28 to have the Fourth Army withdraw while its victory was still incomplete, he accepted his superior's decision because the proposed withdrawal would benefit the entire French Army.[48] Five days later, the Commander-in-Chief

consulted de Langle about the best place from where to launch an eventual counter-attack. Joffre preferred to end the retreat on the Seine River; his subordinate, the Marne.[49]

It seems that Foch always displayed good judgment on September 5 despite some historians' criticism of certain of his decisions. At 22:00 on September 4, Joffre ordered him to protect the right wing of the Fifth Army by holding the area south of the Saint-Gond Marshes and stationing part of his forces on the plateau north of the village of Sézanne. However, the Generalissimo also wrote that the offensive would be carried out by the aforementioned armies (the Fifth, Sixth, Ninth, and the BEF) on September 6.[50] Therefore, Foch was partly justified in interpreting this ambiguous order as permission for the Ninth Army to participate in the offensive.

The Commander of the Ninth Army's offensive strategy and deployment of forces have been criticized by two of his biographers. General Sir James Marshall-Cornwall asserts that "Foch abandoned the defensive cover of the marshes."[51] Captain Basil Henry Liddell Hart disagrees with Marshall-Cornwall; the former blames Foch for having needlessly placed "the bulk of the IX Corps" behind the marshes, which almost any small force could have held successfully because the Germans were limited to using four exposed causeways to traverse them. Liddell Hart also claims that the Germans were preparing to concentrate their attacks on the less rugged terrain east of the marshes where Foch had foolishly placed the fewest number

of soldiers, that a thirty-kilometer gap existed between the Ninth and Fourth armies, and that Foch's desire to capture the heights north of the marshes left him without a reserve.[52]

The AFGG contradicts Marshall-Cornwall's statement and disputes several of Liddell Hart's assertions. It reveals that the Commander of the Ninth Army neither relinquished the marshes nor deployed an overly numerous force to defend them. Since Foch realized that the enemy would need to seize the causeways in order to accomplish the difficult task of crossing the marshes, he wisely stationed only a small number of troops from the IX Corps behind them. Liddell Hart is correct in stating that the ground east of Saint-Gond did not lend itself to defensive warfare and, consequently, the Germans decided to strike there; however, he is wrong in declaring that Foch did not place enough units in the area, for the latter assigned his entire XI Corps to hold it. Liddell Hart legitimately broaches the subject of the wide gap between the Ninth and Fourth armies, where the Germans could have easily broken through the one cavalry division which formed the French line. What he fails to mention, however, is that Foch was not responsible for this potentially disastrous situation. The Commander of the Ninth Army could not obtain any assistance from de Langle because Joffre had ordered the latter to co-ordinate his movements with those of Sarrail's Third Army which was moving in a south-easterly direction, away from Foch. Finally, Liddell Hart is accurate

in arguing that Foch's plan to capture the heights north of the marshes deprived the Ninth Army of a reserve, for the latter used two divisions of his IX Corps in the assault. Once again, however, Foch had a good reason for his decision: he wanted to assist the Fifth Army by occupying the heights so that the Germans would be unable to use them as high ground from which to bombard the advancing French infantry.[53]

Foch obviously considered the success of the Fifth Army's advance to be more important to the overall Allied counter-offensive than what might have occurred in the gap between the Ninth and Fourth armies. Gambling that his cavalry division would hold there until the reinforcements Joffre had already dispatched from the First Army arrived,[54] Foch chose to support the Fifth Army by conducting offensive operations with his left wing on September 6. Events soon unfolded, fortunately for France, as Foch had anticipated: the Germans were neither able to penetrate the right wing of the Ninth Army nor stop the advance of the Fifth Army. The failure of Foch's own offensive was not serious because his efforts distracted several divisions of the German Second Army which otherwise could have helped their comrades in the same unit to withstand Franchet d' Esperey's attacks.

The limited available evidence seems to indicate that Lanrezac's errors in judgment were more numerous than his sagacious decisions, but that the quality of the latter was of far greater importance than the quantity of the former

during the Battle of Charleroi.

When the Fifth Army reached the Sambre, its commander became reluctant to cross it because he feared taking the offensive without protection for his flanks. Lanrezac stated his concerns in a note to Supreme Headquarters at 12:30 on August 21, in which he advised Joffre that the BEF would be unable to assist him until August 23 or 24 and the French Fourth Army was located far behind his right wing. The Commander of the Fifth Army concluded by asking the Generalissimo if his troops had to begin their offensive north of the Sambre the following day. The Commander-in-Chief replied that Lanrezac was free to choose the date of his advance.[55] This response led to Lanrezac adopting an immediate defensive posture.

Thus far, the Commander of the Fifth Army had exercised sound judgment: his troops were stationed behind two rivers, ready to repel any attack while waiting to take the offensive in a few days. However, at this point in time, Lanrezac began to commit some serious tactical errors, the first of which was his refusal to occupy the heights on the right bank of the Sambre. He advised Joffre that his decision was motivated by circumspection: to seize the heights his troops would have to pass through industrial cities, where they might become involved in sanguine house-to-house fighting.[56] Lanrezac's argument seems valid, but, as Spears rightly points out, Bülow soon ordered his troops to enter the cities, which they did

without difficulty.[57]

According to Spears, the Commander of the Fifth Army's disposition of his troops left him without a reserve and his artillery was not emplaced to destroy the bridges in the event of a German assault.[58] The first part of Spears' statement is incorrect, for he himself later admitted that Lanrezac had two reserve divisions available on August 22.[59] The second half of his assertion is true. The reason for Lanrezac's failure to shell the bridges is inexplicable and inexcusable, for he believed strongly in the efficacity of artillery.[60]

At 19:50, Lanrezac notified Joffre of the tranquillity in his army's sector, except for a minor engagement between some German advance guards and the rear guards of the French X Corps. He did not realize that a full-scale battle had been taking place for several hours. The Commander of the Fifth Army acknowledges this ignorance in his memoirs, but he absolves himself of blame by arguing that it was unimportant because he had always intended to make a stand south of the Sambre.[61]

Lanrezac continued to make mistakes the following day. Although he knew that the BEF was in danger of being enveloped, he, in effect, asked Sir John French to expose his left wing to Kluck's forces by striking Bülow's right flank in order to relieve the pressure on the French Fifth Army. The British Commander-in-Chief offered to comply with Lanrezac's request if the enemy opposite him were small in

number; otherwise, he would help the Commander of the Fifth Army by maintaining his present positions for another twenty-four hours.[62] As the day wore on, the BEF and the French XVIII Corps became separated by a considerable distance, with the result that the British faced the possibility of being attacked frontally and on both flanks. Lanrezac eventually decided to re-establish liaison between the BEF and the XVIII Corps by committing his two reserve divisions to the gap, but his procrastination made the move ineffective, thus leaving the BEF in potential danger.[63]

When two of Lanrezac's corps commanders told him they were going to launch (what turned out to be disastrous) counter-attacks, he remained mute in spite of his previous orders to them to avoid offensive actions.[64] To counter a menace to his right flank, Lanrezac ordered the I Corps to move northward, which left the Meuse undefended. The Commander of the Fifth Army gambled that a reserve division would be able to hold the line until the French Fourth Army arrived the following day. Unbeknownst to Lanrezac, de Langle's forces were already in retreat, and the German Third Army reached the Meuse on August 23, which compelled him to instruct the I Corps to return to its original position in order to stop Hausen's advance guards.[65]

Lanrezac's tactical generalship did not improve on the final day of the battle. At 07:30, the Commander of the I Corps advised him of the X Corps' readiness to move forward

and that a combined attack might produce excellent results because the X Corps' front was devoid of enemy troops. The Commander of the Fifth Army spent most of the day trying to make up his mind whether or not to follow his subordinate's advice; finally, he declined to sanction the attack because more troops of German Third Army might have arrived, thus exposing his right flank to possible envelopment. However, as Spears rightly points out, one division of the I Corps could have struck Bülow's left flank, while the other division held off Hausen's advance units.[66]

By 21:00, Lanrezac had not received any instructions from Joffre, and, fearing the imminent encirclement and destruction of the Fifth Army, he ordered his troops to retreat. Lanrezac only notified Supreme Headquarters of his decision thirty minutes later, for he anticipated a negative reply had he asked for permission beforehand.[67] The Generalissimo approved Lanrezac's decision the next morning.[68]

The evidence seems to indicate that Lanrezac exhibited good judgment throughout the Battle of Guise. At 11:00, he told the Commander of the I Corps to continue moving towards the Oise River and intervene only in the case of absolute necessity to help the X Corps.[69] Two hours later, Lanrezac considered the circumstances propitious to commit his reserve (the I Corps) to the battle.[70] Most contemporaries and historians, including some of the Commander of the Fifth Army's severest critics, rightly praise his performance, which

was instrumental in the significant local success that the French forces achieved.[71]

The extremely limited available evidence seems to indicate that Franchet d'Esperey always displayed sound judgment during his brief tenure as Commander of the Fifth Army. On September 3, when Joffre asked Franchet d'Esperey if the Fifth Army could resume offensive operations, the latter replied negatively because of his troops' extreme fatigue. The following day the Generalissimo again sought his subordinate's advice about the same matter. Franchet d'Esperey gave an affirmative reply this time, provided the attack took place no earlier than September 6; in addition, the co-operation of the Sixth and Ninth armies as well as the BEF would be required to ensure its success. Joffre agreed with the Commander of the Fifth Army's judgment in both cases.[72]

Maunoury made three mistakes in judgment on September 5, the first of which was his failure to foresee the possibility of a battle occurring.[73] At 15:00, the Commander of the Sixth Army notified General Gallieni that all his units had reached places which in fact only some arrived at over eight hours later. At 16:00, Maunoury instructed his troops to keep advancing the following day, even though his knowledge of the enemy's whereabouts and those of his own forces was vague.[74] However, Maunoury had, despite several errors in judgment, placed the German First Army in a disadvantageous situation.[75]

Based on the limited available evidence, the Commander of

the Sixth Army seems to have exercised sound judgment at all other times during the campaign. On August 24, Supreme Headquarters ordered Maunoury to defend the heights north of Verdun; but the Commander of the Army of Lorraine was also authorized to exercise his own initiative if an unforeseen situation were to develop. He telephoned Belin and said that a local success could be achieved if the latter would grant him permission to use some of his reserve divisions to support Ruffey's attack. Belin recommended that Maunoury employ a maximum of two divisions. The latter wanted to commit five divisions to the battle. Belin obviously trusted Maunoury's judgment because he terminated the conversation by saying that the Commander of the Army of Lorraine was better able to judge the situation due to his proximity to the front. Maunoury decided to support Ruffey's assault with five divisions, and their joint efforts were relatively successful.[76]

On August 31, Maunoury informed Supreme Headquarters of Kluck's change of direction; the Commander of the Sixth Army suggested a co-ordinated assault by his forces and the BEF on the exposed right flank of the German First Army the following day despite his troops' fatigue, but he predicted better results would be achieved if the attack were delayed until September 2. Joffre praised Maunoury's lucid assessment of the situation. However, the Generalissimo forbade the strike because of the great distance between the French Fifth and Sixth armies, the present unreliability of the BEF, and

Maunoury's principal mission of protecting Paris, to where Joffre ordered him to retreat immediately.[77]

CONCLUSIONS

The French Army emphasized obedience rather than individual initiative in order to create a monolithic entity. However, its efforts to impose conformity of thought were, fortunately for France, not entirely "successful." Some officers only pretended to conform; they thought but kept their ideas to themselves.[78] The ten French army commanders of 1914, with the possible exception of Pau, exercised independent judgment during the Great Retreat. Many of the decisions they made were far from billiant, but each one's judgment was sound enough at least to have enabled him to retain his post. However, Joffre felt obliged to remove Lanrezac, Pau and Ruffey. Since he must have had valid reasons for doing so, it will be useful to analyze the ten army commanders' relationships with Allied generals (if any), superiors and subordinates, and their health during the campaign in order to discover if they merited the fate that Joffre eventually handed out to them.

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

[1] William J. Wood, Leaders and Battles: The Art of Military Leadership (Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1984), pp. 86-87, 202-203.

[2] AFGG, T 1:1 (A) no. 103; Joffre, Mémoires, I, p. 253.

[3] AFGG, T 1:1 (A) no. 159; Joffre, Mémoires, I, pp. 254-255.

[4] Dominique, La Victoire, pp. 108-114; Contamine, La Victoire, pp. 105-110; Asprey, The First Battle, pp. 37-38, 47-48.

[5] Correlli Barnett, The Swordbearers: Studies in Supreme Command in the First World War (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1963), pp. 59-60; John Terraine, Mons: The Retreat to Victory (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1960), p. 65; Tuchman, The Guns of August, pp. 232-234.

[6] AFGG, T 1:2 (A2) no. 2157; Dominique, La Victoire, pp. 158-161; The Canadian General Staff, The Western Front 1914 (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1957), p. 34; Tuchman, The Guns of August, pp. 364-365, 375-376, 437.

[7] Asprey, The First Battle, p. 113; Caffrey, Farewell, Leicester Square, p. 181; Tuchman, The Guns of August, p. 437.

[8] AFGG, T1: 1 (A) no. 33; Joffre, Mémoires, I, pp. 231-234.

[9] AFGG, T1: 1 (A) no. 103.

[10] Ibid., T1: 1 (A) no. 305; Joffre, Mémoires, I, pp. 269-270.

[11] AFGG, T1: 1 (A) no. 700; Joffre, Mémoires, I, pp. 275-276.

[12] AFGG, T1: 2 (A2) no. 1622; Joffre, Mémoires, I, p. 355; Foch, Mémoires, I, p.88.

[13] Foch commanded the newly created Ninth Army. Its mission was to maintain liaison between the Fourth and Fifth Armies. See AFGG, T1: 2 (A1) no. 1179.

[14] Ibid., T1: 2 (A2) nos. 2330, 2332; Joffre, Mémoires, I, p. 389-390; Foch, Mémoires, I, pp. 93-94.

Joffre's General Order No. 6 was ambiguous. He instructed Foch to have his left wing cover the French Fifth Army's advance by remaining on the defensive. However, the Generalissimo's next sentence stated that the aforementioned armies would take the offensive on September 6. Since the

Ninth Army was one of those units, Joffre had unintentionally given Foch the opportunity to decide for himself whether to conduct strictly offensive or defensive operations or a combination of both. Foch's interpretation of the order is examined in this chapter in the section on his judgment.

[15]For detailed accounts of the battles of Charleroi and Mons, see Barnett, The Swordbearers, pp. 54-67; Terraine, Mons, pp. 59-108; Colonel Adolphe Goutard, Six Semaines de guerre-éclair. Vol. I; La Marne: victoire inexploitée (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1968), pp. 115-134.

[16]AFGG, T1: 2 (A1) no. 395; Joffre, Mémoires, I, pp. 308-313; Blond, The Marne, pp. 51-52; Isselin, The Battle of the Marne, pp. 57-60.

[17]AFGG, T1: 1 (A) no. 1279; T1: 2 (A1) nos. 892, 619; Joffre, Mémoires, I, pp. 320, 324.

[18]Wallach, The Dogma of the Battle of Annihilation, pp. 103-106; Tuchman, The Guns of August, pp. 293-294; Herwig and Heyman, Biographical Dictionary, pp. 13, 257.

[19]For detailed accounts of the Battle of Guise, see Spears, Liaison, pp. 268-279; Beau and Gaubusseau, Lanrezac, pp. 165-175; Goutard, La Marne, pp. 167-168.

[20]Generaloberst Alexander von Kluck, The March on Paris and the Battle of the Marne (London: Edward Arnold, 1920), pp. 80-99; Barnett, The Swordbearers, pp. 74-85; Spears, Liaison, pp. 280-355.

[21]Dominique, La Victoire, pp. 240-241.

[22]Kluck, The March on Paris, pp. 99-114; Barnett, The Swordbearers, pp. 85-88; Wallach, The Dogma of the Battle of Annihilation, pp. 106-110; Liddell Hart, Foch, pp. 98-99.

[23]AFGG, T1: 2 (A2) no. 2332; Joffre, Mémoires, I, pp. 389-390; Goutard, La Marne, p. 239; Isselin, The Battle of the Marne, p. 124.

[24]Dominique, La Victoire, pp. 273-278; Isselin, The Battle of the Marne, pp. 128-149; Goutard, La Marne, pp. 249-261.

[25]AFGG, T 1:1 (A) nos. 816,878.
Joffre's reaction to the Commander of the Seventh Army's reply was not recorded, but the Generalissimo could not have been pleased. Pau's complaint about the problem of supplying the inhabitants of Mulhouse may have been a subtle indication of his preference to abandon the city, but, if so, he should have expressed his opinion frankly.

[26]Dominique, La Victoire, p. 113.

[27]Dubail, Quatre Années de Commandement, p. 88; AFGG, T1: 2 (A2) nos. 2034, 2038, 1988.

[28]Isselin, The Battle of the Marne, p.56.
The Commander of the Second Army was not entirely to blame, however, for he had seen the Germans retreat for nearly one week, and, accepting Joffre's assessment of the enemy's numerical inferiority, expected the French advance to continue. This explanation does not absolve de Castelnau of responsibility for the defeats and heavy casualties his troops sustained, but it does make his overconfidence more understandable.

[29]AFGG, T 1:1 (A) no. 627; Joffre, Mémoires, I, p. 280; Goutard, La Marne, pp. 110-111; Asprey, The First Battle, pp. 47-48; Dominique, La Victoire, pp. 112-113.

[30]Foch, Mémoires, I, pp. 61-62; Gamelin, Manoeuvre, p. 68; Goutard, La Marne, p. 110; Tuchman, The Guns of August, p. 232.

[31]AFGG, T 1:1 (A) nos. 727, 707, 738; Joffre, Mémoires, I, pp. 284-286; Asprey, The First Battle, pp. 61-62; Goutard, La Marne, p. 111; Terraine, Mons, p. 71.
According to Henry Contamine, de Castelnau wanted to retreat to the Meuse because the Couronné did not form, in the latter's opinion, a strong enough barrier to stop the Germans. See Contamine, La Victoire, pp. 158-159.
Neither de Castelnau's contemporaries nor other historians have ever mentioned this possibility as an explanation for his proposed strategy. Since the Couronné--despite its relatively low elevation--proved formidable enough to present a serious obstacle to the non-motorized German Sixth Army in 1914, it is more likely that de Castelnau was concerned about the condition of his troops and their capacity to maintain themselves on any defensive line if the enemy continued to pressure them. He wanted to disengage, and the topography of the Couronné probably had little, if any, influence on his desire to withdraw to the Meuse.

[32]AFGG, T 1:2 (A2) no. 2501; T 1:3 (A1) no. 222; Joffre, Mémoires, I, pp. 398-399; Giraud, Castelnau, p. 52.

[33]Joffre, Mémoires, I, p. 407.

[34]Contamine, La Victoire, p. 133.

[35]Tuchman, The Guns of August, p. 240.

[36]AFGG, T1: 1 (A) no. 630.

[37]Ibid., T1: 1 (A) no. 741; Dominique, La Victoire, p. 122; Tanenbaum, Sarrail, pp. 38-39.

[38]Contamine, La Victoire, p. 133.

[39]AFGG, T1: 2 (A1) nos. 205, 152.

[40]Ibid., T1: 2 (A2) nos. 1993, 2212; Tanenbaum, Sarrail, p. 41; Liddell Hart, Foch, p. 98; Joffre, Mémoires, I, p. 367.

Joffre's ultimate intentions remain a source of controversy. In his memoirs, Gamelin affirms that Joffre never thought of retreating as far as the town of Bar-le-Duc. Gamelin made this statement in relation to September 1, and the AFGG confirms his assertion that a withdrawal to Bar-le-Duc was only a possibility. See Gamelin, Manoeuvre, pp. 150-152 and the AFGG, T1: 2 (A2) no. 1792.

However, the Generalissimo did not equivocate the following day: Sarrail was to pull back to Joinville, thirty kilometers south of Bar-le-Duc. Moreover, Joffre did not attempt to rationalize the order in his memoirs.

Gamelin's failure to mention Joffre's order of September 2 may have been caused by his desire to place the Commander-in-Chief in the best possible light, for he was the Generalissimo's personal "confidant" at Supreme Headquarters. See Prete, "Coalition Warfare," p. 86.

[41]Tuchman, The Guns of August, p. 240.

[42]Gamelin, Manoeuvre, p. 73; Goutard, La Marne, p. 139.

[43]AFGG, T1: 1 (A) nos. 637, 589; de Langle, Souvenirs, p. 134; Gamelin, Manoeuvre, pp. 72-73; Terraine, Mons, p. 64; Dominique, La Victoire, pp. 118-119; Goutard, La Marne, pp. 137-138.

[44]AFGG, T1: 2(A2) nos. 1657, 1622, 1780.

[45]Ibid., T1: 1 (A) nos. 1104, 1048, 1107; T1: 2 (A1) no. 217; Joffre, Mémoires, I, pp. 294, 299; Dominique, La Victoire, pp. 121-122; Goutard, La Marne, pp. 143-144; Tuchman, The Guns of August, pp. 242-243.

[46]De Langle, Souvenirs, pp. 139-140.

[47]AFGG, T1: 2 (A1) no. 880; Joffre, Mémoires, I, p. 327.

[48]De Langle, Souvenirs, p. 146.

[49]Ibid., p. 154.

[50]AFFG, T1: 2 (A2) no. 2332; Liddell Hart, Foch, p. 102; Marshall-Cornwall, Foch, pp. 92-93.

[51]Ibid., p. 95.

[52]Liddell Hart, Foch, p. 103.

[53]AFGG, T1: 2 (A2) no. 2562; Foch, Mémoires, I, pp. 94-100; Général Maxim Weygand, Mémoires. Vol. I: Idéal Vécu (Paris: Flammarion, Editeur, 1953), pp. 106-107; Weygand, Foch, pp. 64-65; Hunter, Foch, p. 59.

[54]André Tardieu, Avec Foch (Août-Novembre 1914) (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1939), pp. 46-48.

[55]AFGG, T1: 1 (A) nos. 705, 759; Joffre, Mémoires, I, p. 289; Gamelin, Manoeuvre, p. 71; Goutard, La Marne, p. 120; Dominique, La Victoire, p. 126; Tuchman, The Guns of August, p. 246.

[56]AFGG, T1: 1 (A) no. 648; Général Charles Lanrezac, Le Plan de campagne français et le premier mois de la guerre (2 août-3 septembre 1914) (Paris: Payot et compagnie, 1920), p. 115.

[57]Spears, Liaison, pp. 114-115, 111.

[58]Ibid., p. 134; Asprey, The First Battle, p. 52.

[59]Spears, Liaison, pp. 147, 214-215; Prete, "Coalition Warfare," pp. 167-168; Field-Marshal Viscount Sir John French of Ypres, 1914 (London: Constable and Company Ltd., 1919), p. 59.

[60]AFGG, T1: 2 (A1) no. 699; Spears, Liaison, p. 371.

[61]AFGG, T1: 1 (A) no. 763; Joffre, Mémoires, I, p. 290; Lanrezac, Le Plan de campagne français, p. 157; Spears, Liaison, p. 162; Goutard, La Marne, p. 123.

[62]AFGG, T1: 1 (A) no. 1054; Joffre, Mémoires, I, p. 295; Spears, Liaison, p. 150; French, 1914, pp. 58-59; Prete, "Coalition Warfare," pp. 166-169; Richard Holmes, The Little Field-Marshal: Sir John French (London: Jonathan Cape, 1981), p. 214.

[63]Spears, Liaison, p. 147.

[64]AFGG, T1: 1 (A) nos. 760, 779; Goutard, La Marne, p. 123; Beau and Gaubusseau, Lanrezac, p. 127.

Beau and Gaubusseau, who are Lanrezac's most ardent defenders, mention the corps commanders' disobedience, but

they ignore the issue of the two generals having informed the Commander of the Fifth Army of their intentions and his silence (which implied agreement).

[65]AFGG, T1: 1 (A) nos. 871, 1118; Asprey, The First Battle, pp. 52-53.

[66]AFGG, T1: 1 (A) no. 1131; Lanrezac, Le Plan de campagne français, pp. 178-179; Spears, Liaison, pp. 158-161; Terraine, Mons, pp. 95-96; Contamine, La Victoire, p. 117; Goutard, La Marne, pp. 128-129.

[67]AFGG, T1: 1 (A) nos. 1119-1120; Lanrezac, Le Plan de campagne français, pp. 181-185; Joffre, Mémoires, I, p. 295; Azan, Franchet d' Esperey, p. 89; Asprey, The First Battle, p. 53; Tuchman, The Guns of August, p. 253.

[68]AFGG, T1: 1 (A) no. 1263, p. 497; Beau and Gaubusseau, Lanrezac, p. 137; Gamelin, Manoeuvre, p. 74; Spears, Liaison, p. 188; Azan, Franchet d'Esperey, p. 89; Tuchman, The Guns of August, p. 254.

[69]AFGG, T1: 2 (A1) no. 1246; Azan, Franchet d'Esperey, p. 97.

[70]AFGG, T1: 2 (A1) no. 1248.

[71]Joffre, Mémoires, I, p. 339; French, 1914, p. 91; Spears, Liaison, pp. 268-269; Gamelin, Manoeuvre, pp. 130-133; Terraine, Mons, pp. 174-176; Blond, The Marne, p. 64; George H. Cassar, The Tragedy of Sir John French (London: Associated University Press, 1985), p. 129.

Three historians criticize Lanrezac for having established his headquarters a distant thirty kilometers behind the front, which left him out of touch with the situation because messages had to be communicated by courier. Delays in receiving information and transmitting orders nearly cost the Fifth Army the local success it won that day. See Asprey, The First Battle, p. 77; Canadian General Staff, The Western Front 1914, pp. 68-69; Azan, Franchet d'Esperey, p. 95.

[72]AFGG, T1: 2 (A2) nos. 2327, 2398-2399; Joffre, Mémoires, I, pp. 372, 387-388; Terraine, Mons, pp. 206-207; Contamine, La Victoire, pp. 266-270; Goutard, La Marne, pp. 234-236.

[73]Canadian General Staff, The Western Front 1914, p. 87.

[74]AFGG, T1: 2 (A2) nos. 2543-2544, 2551; Spears, Liaison, pp. 423-424.

[75]Isselin, The Battle of the Marne, p. 149.

[76] AFGG, T1: 2 (A1) nos. 146, 243-245, 248; Joffre, Mémoires, I, pp. 312-313.

[77] AFGG, T1: 2 (A2) nos. 1689, 1783; Joffre, Mémoires, I, pp. 355-356; Gamelin, Manoeuvre, pp. 148-149; Isselin, The Battle of the Marne, pp. 80-81; Contamine, La Victoire, p. 218; Asprey, The First Battle, p. 85.

[78] Serman, Les Officiers Français, pp. 18-20, 227-228.

CHAPTER III

THE TEN FRENCH ARMY COMMANDERS' RELATIONSHIPS WITH ALLIES, JOFFRE AND SUBORDINATES, AND THEIR HEALTH DURING THE CAMPAIGN

Based on the eleven qualities and skills of generalship which have been examined thus far, none of the ten army commanders deserved to be replaced. Therefore, other factors must have influenced Joffre's decisions to cashier Lanrezac, Pau and Ruffey. In this chapter, the ten army commanders' relationships with allied military leaders (if any), the Generalissimo and subordinates, as well as their health during the campaign will be assessed in order to determine whether or not the Commander-in-Chief always made the correct personnel decisions.

Lanrezac was the only one of the three limogés who commanded an army which fought alongside foreign units. Contemporaries and historians have emphasized the xenophobic Lanrezac's rudeness towards Sir John French during their initial conversation on August 17, their misunderstandings over the date of the BEF's arrival on the left flank of the French Fifth Army, the use of the British cavalry as horsemen or mounted infantry, and the billeting arrangements for soldiers of the French XVIII Corps in the BEF's sector of operations as the root causes of the ultimate near-total lack of co-operation between the two field commanders.[1] However, there is no evidence to support this contention, for Sir John

wrote in his diary on August 17 that Lanrezac seemed a very competent general, with whom he had reached agreement on all the vital issues.[2]

The estrangement actually resulted from Lanrezac's failure to notify Sir John of the Fifth Army's planned withdrawal during the night of August 23/24. An angry Sir John informed Lanrezac the following morning that the latter would have to protect his own left flank henceforth because, in the event of a grave menace to the BEF's left wing, he planned to order the entire Expeditionary Force to retreat.[3] Although Joffre had realized that there was some friction between Lanrezac and Sir John, he only became fully aware of the degree of their mutual dislike when the three of them conferred in the town of Saint-Quentin on August 26. When Sir John complained of having been abandoned by Lanrezac, the latter merely shrugged his shoulders. The Generalissimo left the meeting none too pleased with either of them, and rightly so.[4] Two days later, General Sir Douglas Haig, the Commander of the I Corps of the BEF, offered to help Lanrezac counter-attack the Germans at Guise. Sir John, erroneously arguing that Haig's corps needed complete rest as much as General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien's II Corps, rejected his subordinate's proposal. The Commander of the BEF's decision infuriated Lanrezac.[5]

It is obvious that Lanrezac and Sir John were incompatible, mostly due to the Commander of the Fifth Army's unannounced withdrawal on August 23 and his subsequent indifference to the

leader of BEF's justifiable complaints about it. Lanrezac's self-centeredness had transformed an enthusiastic ally into a sullen potential runaway in a few hours.

Allied armies always risk having difficult relations between commanders. In particular, it is possible to argue that Britons and Frenchmen were prone to serious disagreements, and, therefore, Lanrezac should not be blamed for the estrangement between Sir John and himself. However, the other French army commanders managed to work co-operatively with the leader of the BEF. When Franchet d'Esperey succeeded Lanrezac, Joffre ordered him to act cordially towards Sir John. Franchet d'Esperey's first step was to send a telegram to the Field-Marshal on September 4, asking for a meeting to discuss the situation that day. He included the initials of the Order that Britain had conferred on him in early 1914 as a way of displaying his appreciation of the honour. This courteous gesture pleased Sir John, who became more co-operative thereafter. The Generalissimo credited the new Commander of the Fifth Army with restoring close co-operation between the British and French forces.[6]

Maunoury also collaborated well with Sir John. On September 1, the Commander of the Sixth Army informed the leader of the BEF that a French brigade had been sent to assist a British unit. Maunoury also praised the BEF's counter-attack, which had helped to re-establish the Allied front. Sir John greatly approved of Maunoury's magnanimity

and courtesy.[7]

Lanrezac and Joffre had great difficulty in working co-operatively during the campaign. On July 31, the Commander of the Fifth Army sent a letter to the Generalissimo, in which he stated that the Fifth Army's planned offensive towards the town of Neufchâteau was a wise course of action because the right wing of the German Army would probably advance in the direction of the city of Sedan. The Commander of the Fifth Army went on to mention the possibility of three German armies marching through western Belgium, which recent enemy war studies had envisaged; in the event of the second hypothesis becoming reality, Lanrezac accurately foresaw the impossibility of the Fifth Army countering it due to its movement towards Neufchâteau. Lanrezac concluded by stating that the letter was only intended to be "for the record."

In his memoirs, the Generalissimo acknowledges receipt of the letter the following day. He claims to have already foreseen his subordinate's concerns and developed contingency plans to move the Fifth Army northward in the event of a German sweep through western Belgium, and, therefore, did not bother to take time from his busy schedule to send a reply to Lanrezac.

In his memoirs, the Commander of the Fifth Army admits to having predicted Sedan as the more likely objective of the German Army, but he argues that his original words reflected Joffre's views, not his own. According to Lanrezac, his

expression "for the record" implied his hope for a future meeting with the Generalissimo in order to discuss the situation, but the latter never expressed an interest in consulting him.[8]

Lanrezac's statements about the letter must be true; otherwise, sending it would have been a total waste of time and effort. However, he should have frankly stated his meaning and wishes. Anyone reading the document would almost undoubtedly arrive at the same conclusion as Joffre: The Commander of the Fifth Army agreed with Supreme Headquarters that the German right wing would advance east of the Meuse, and there was no need to discuss the matter further.

During the next two weeks, Lanrezac repeatedly warned Joffre of a possible German offensive through western Belgium, but he lacked concrete evidence to support his suspicions. Consequently, the Generalissimo could not be blamed for continuing to ignore the pleas of his subordinate to strengthen the left wing of the Allied armies. Some German cavalry units finally reached the Meuse at the Belgian city of Dinant on August 15, and Joffre reacted appropriately by ordering Lanrezac to move the Fifth Army between the Sambre and the Meuse.[9]

On August 27, Joffre, who had learned from an intercepted German radio transmission that Bülow's troops would not be conducting large-scale operations against the French Fifth Army for several days, ordered Lanrezac to move his forces

towards the northwest and strike the left flank of Kluck's southernmost corps in order to disengage the hard-pressed BEF. Lieutenant-Colonel Alexandre, a liaison officer assigned to the Fifth Army by Supreme Headquarters, gave the Generalissimo's instructions to Lanrezac's Chief of Operations, Major Schneider. When Schneider explained the difficulty of turning an army ninety degrees in such a short time, Alexandre minimized the problem. A violent argument ensued, in which the Commander of the Fifth Army and his Chief of Staff became involved. Lanrezac lost his temper and bluntly expressed an unfavourable opinion of Joffre's strategy. Alexandre informed Joffre of what had happened, and the Commander-in-Chief decided to visit Fifth Army Headquarters the next day.[10] Lanrezac later acknowledged that his frankness had marked the beginning of his eventual downfall.[11]

Joffre and Lanrezac met on August 28. The Commander of the Fifth Army objected to the proposed attack because of the exhaustion of his troops and the danger to his right flank. The Generalissimo reiterated his wish to disengage the BEF. At this point, Lanrezac repeated his objections, and Joffre angrily threatened to cashier him if he did not follow orders immediately.[12] The Commander of Fifth Army later claimed that once his superior had regained control of himself, a reasoned discussion took place during which Joffre partially accepted his arguments. Lanrezac asked Joffre for a written order,

which was provided a few minutes afterward. The Commander of the Fifth Army then asserted that he had already done what the Generalissimo was instructing him to do. Lanrezac's attitude and behaviour disturbed Joffre to such an extent that he made up his mind to return the following day in order to observe how his subordinate conducted military operations.[13]

Historian W.A. Stewart rightly stresses the importance of Lanrezac's request to have the order put in writing as one of the main reasons for his eventual dismissal.[14]

Joffre was on the verge of replacing Lanrezac on August 29, but the latter's sang-froid and obvious competence that day deterred him. The Fifth Army's successful counter-offensive, however, left both its flanks exposed, and its leader telephoned Supreme Headquarters at 22:30, asking for permission to retreat. Since Joffre was away, Belin refused to issue the order. Lanrezac insisted on receiving written instructions or he would remain stationary, which might result in his troops being surrounded and destroyed. An incredulous Belin repeated that he could not act without the Generalissimo's authorization. The Commander of the Fifth Army ended the conversation by promising to maintain his present positions until instructions arrived from Supreme Headquarters.

Joffre sent the order to withdraw at 23:00, but it never arrived that night. He verbally instructed the Fifth Army to retire at 06:00 the following morning. According to Spears,

Lanrezac, who knew he would be told to pull back, played a game merely to annoy Joffre, and the game could have had disastrous consequences due to the loss of the order. Fortunately for Lanrezac, the Germans did not attack his forces.[15]

Lanrezac obviously had great difficulty in accepting Joffre's decisions. The blame did not lie exclusively with the Commander of the Fifth Army, for the Generalissimo was not an easy man to deal with. Nevertheless, Pau and the seven army commanders who retained their posts all faced the same problems Lanrezac did and none of them reacted adversely to his Commander-in-Chief's leadership. On August 3, Joffre conferred with most of the army commanders. Dubail advised him of the Commander of the VII Corps' request for more troops before undertaking his mission of seizing Mulhouse. The Generalissimo enigmatically replied that it was Dubail's plan, not his.[16] Dubail's reaction was not recorded, but the man may be forgiven if he harboured serious doubts about Joffre's qualifications to be Commander-in-Chief.[17] As was indicated in note eight of the preface of this study, de Castelnau (who did not attend the meeting of August 3) favoured an all-out offensive, but he opposed his superior's choice of Lorraine because of its rugged terrain.[18] Despite their possible misgivings about Joffre, neither general castigated him publicly.

Lanrezac almost invariably remained aloof from his

subordinates. He spoke with the Commander of the I Corps twice during the entire campaign, and both conversations were brief and trivial.[19] During the Battle of Charleroi, Lanrezac conversed with only the Commander of the X Corps. Lanrezac reprimanded one general, but Spears believed that he did so only because he himself had been excoriated by Joffre seconds earlier.[20]

It could be argued that Lanrezac was the type of general who preferred to remain remote from his subordinates so as to allow them maximum freedom of action. This argument is plausible, except that anyone as anxious as Lanrezac about the conduct of the war should have become more directly involved in order to ensure operations in his own sector were being conducted properly. Moreover, giving subordinates virtual free rein only works well if they are capable, but Lanrezac did not have that blessing.[21]

Lanrezac's behaviour differed markedly from that of most of his colleagues. On August 22, de Langle told the Commander of the II Corps that his report had neglected to mention his future course of action; he ordered his subordinate to clear the Germans from his sector by attacking in a northerly direction prior to resuming his march towards the east. Five days later, de Castelnau advised the Commander of the XV Corps of the insufficient depth of his formation and to rectify it by moving one of his divisions to a more appropriate location.[22] After having listened to the complaints of the

Commander of the IX Corps about his troops' fatigue on August 29, Foch told him to put them from his mind and concentrate on the task at hand.[23] The following day, Dubail notified the Commander of the XIV Corps of the impossibility of pulling his units out of the front line; the Commander of the First Army stated that the XIV Corps would have to re-organize and recuperate in its present location because victory would belong to whichever side better tolerated attrition.[24] On September 3, the Commander of the XVIII Corps telephoned Franchet d'Esperey and said his troops needed rest. The Commander of the Fifth Army ordered his subordinate to have them "march or croak," and he abruptly terminated the conversation.[25]

Lanrezac's health held up fairly well during the Battle of Charleroi, but Joffre noticed signs of severe physical and emotional deterioration only five days later. During the Battle of Guise, the Commander of the Fifth Army's nervousness inexplicably disappeared.[26] The Generalissimo ordered him to withdraw towards the Seine on September 2, and, according to Spears, Lanrezac reacted a few hours later by wailing several times, "We're done for!"[27] The Commander of the Fifth Army's behaviour clearly shows that deteriorating health was adversely affecting his judgment, for the French Army remained intact and combative, and even a retreat to the Seine would not have altered those facts.

While it is true that what happened to Lanrezac could

befall any general in a similar situation, it must be pointed out that none of the seven army commanders whom Joffre retained seemed to have suffered anything more than brief periods of psychological fatigue.[28]

Like Lanrezac, Ruffey predicted a massive German invasion through western Belgium, and he warned Joffre about it on August 1. The Generalissimo disregarded the Commander of the Third Army's warning,[29] and there is no evidence of the latter ever having broached the subject a second time.

Ruffey, like Lanrezac, made the mistake of criticizing Joffre in front of a liaison officer from Supreme Headquarters. During the Battle of the Frontiers, the Commander of the Third Army complained that the ignorant, imperceptive, incompetent Generalissimo's operations were even more inept than those of the High Command had been in 1870.[30]

In contrast to Lanrezac, Ruffey sometimes closely supervised his subordinates. On August 23, he ordered the Commander of the V Corps to organize defensive positions, by which he meant deep trenches not mere scratchings into the earth. Four days later, Ruffey instructed the Commander of the Group of Reserve Divisions to ensure that every man did his duty and the flinching of a few days earlier was not repeated; the latter was to inform Ruffey as soon as possible of the measures and sanctions taken to guarantee it.[31]

Joffre only mentioned Ruffey's health once. The Generalissimo claimed he cashiered the Commander of the Third

Army on August 30 because the latter appeared extremely nervous and spoke in an excitable manner.[32] Joffre did not discuss his subordinate's physical condition. The Commander-in-Chief's observations probably were accurate, but they do not prove much, for Ruffey may have been emotional by nature.

Information on Pau's relationship with his subordinates is unavailable; and he and Joffre worked well together after the latter had disbanded the Seventh Army.[33] Pau suffered from physical and emotional fatigue during the campaign, which he openly admitted.[34]

CONCLUSIONS

The seven non-limogés (and possibly Pau) worked co-operatively with their superiors, colleagues and subordinates, whereas Lanrezac and Ruffey did not always do so. Although Joffre placed considerable importance on an army commander's ability to get along with other generals, he regarded good health as the primary quality for a senior officer to have. He retained the army commanders who, in his opinion, were calm and energetic during the campaign, and removed Lanrezac, Pau and Ruffey, whom he considered to be nervous and/or unenergetic. Nevertheless, the Generalissimo was obliged to dismiss and promote so many generals that he could easily have made some incorrect personnel decisions. The conclusions of this study will re-examine the evidence presented thus far and attempt to determine whether or not Joffre invariably retained or removed the army commanders he should have.

NOTES TO CHAPTER III

[1] AFGG, T1: 1 (A) no. 430; Spears, Liaison, pp. 75-79; Lanrezac, Le Plan de campagne français, pp. 91-93; Général Victor Huguet, Britain and the War: A French Indictment (London: Cassell and Company Ltd., 1928), pp. 51-52; Tuchman, The Guns of August, pp. 219-221; Cassar, Sir John French, pp. 93-95; Caffrey, Farewell, Leicester Square, pp. 60-62.

[2] Ascoli, The Mons Star, p. 40 n.; Holmes, The Little Field-Marshal, p. 209.

In his memoirs, Sir John included a letter he had written to Lord Kitchener, the British Secretary of State for War, on August 17, 1914, in which he expressed a very favourable opinion of Lanrezac. See French, 1914, pp. 38-42.

[3] AFGG, T1: 1 (A) no. 1119; Spears, Liaison, pp. 171, 175, 185-186; French, 1914, p. 64; Terraine, Mons, pp. 108-110; Holmes, The Little Field-Marshal, pp. 217-218; Cassar, Sir John French, p. 106.

[4] Joffre, Mémoires, I, pp. 316-319; Spears, Liaison, pp. 228-231; French, 1914, pp. 82-83; Terraine, Mons, pp. 143-145; Caffrey, Farewell, Leicester Square, pp. 116-117; Goutard, La Marne, pp. 164-165.

According to Colonel (later General) Victor Huguet, the Head of the French Military Mission attached to the BEF, Joffre's indifference towards Sir John's complaint was the main reason why a rapprochement between the Briton and Lanrezac never occurred. See Huguet, Britain and the War, pp. 65-68.

[5] AFGG, T1: 2 (A1) nos. 1063, 1003; Spears, Liaison, pp. 256-260; Lanrezac, Le Plan de campagne français, pp. 229-231; Terraine, Mons, p. 172; Dominique, La Victoire, p. 198; Ascoli, The Mons Star, pp. 125-126.

[6] AFGG, T1: 2 (A2) no. 2319; Joffre, Mémoires, I, p. 388; Spears, Liaison, pp. 384-385; Raymond Recouly, Joffre (Paris: Editions Des Portiques, 1931), pp. 112-113; Terraine, Mons, p. 205; Azan, Franchet d'Esperey, p. 106.

Joffre ordered Franchet d'Esperey to act cordially towards Sir John because he himself had been instructed to do so by Millerand, who had succeeded Messimy as Minister of War on August 26. The Generalissimo had to comply because he needed the BEF's co-operation to retain his own post (there was a movement by some disgruntled leftist politicians to have him removed due to the Army's defeats and retreat) and, more importantly, to avoid losing the war. See Prete, "Coalition Warfare," pp. 262-263.

[7] AFGG, T1: 2 (A2) no. 1867; Spears, Liaison, pp. 330-331;

Prete, "Coalition Warfare," p. 273.

[8] AFGG, T1: 1 (A) no. 19; Joffre, Mémoires, I, pp. 228-229; Lanrezac, Le Plan de campagne français, pp. 54-57; Blond, The Marne, p. 57; Asprey, The First Battle, p. 36; Tuchman, The Guns of August, pp. 182-183.

[9] AFGG, T1: 1 (A) nos. 189, 202, 266, 270, 283, 307; Joffre, Mémoires, I, pp. 261, 267-270; Lanrezac, Le Plan de campagne français, pp. 73, 76-81, 83-84; Liddell Hart, Foch, pp. 81-82; Jean de Pierrefeu, Plutarque a menti, (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1923), pp. 68-70; Tuchman, The Guns of August, pp. 208-211; Caffrey, Farewell, Leicester Square, pp. 57-59.

[10] Joffre, Mémoires, I, pp. 325-326; Blond, The Marne, p. 61; Tuchman, The Guns of August, p. 369; Dominique, La Victoire, p. 195.

[11] Lanrezac, Le Plan de campagne français, pp. 214-219; Tuchman, The Guns of August, p. 369.

Jean de Pierrefeu, a staff officer at Supreme Headquarters, argues that some of his colleagues did everything in their power to ensure that Lanrezac was dismissed. See Pierrefeu, Plutarque a menti, p. 64.

Roy Prete acknowledges that liaison officers had some influence on Joffre's personnel decisions; whether or not a general was retained, promoted or cashiered often depended, in part, on what a liaison officer told the Generalissimo about him. See Prete, "Coalition Warfare," p. 87.

According to Paul Allard, Alexandre later claimed to have been the instigator of Lanrezac's removal. Allard, L'Oreille Fendue, p. 43. See also Beau and Gaubusseau, Lanrezac, p. 152.

However, it is necessary to remember that Lanrezac's performance, behaviour and attitude gave Joffre, at least, some justification to remove him, and the final decision rested with the Commander-in-Chief. Alexandre's role in Lanrezac's removal was probably of only minor importance.

[12] Joffre, Mémoires, I, pp. 332-333; Contamine, La Victoire, p. 185; Dominique, La Victoire, p. 198; Goutard, La Marne, p. 166; Gamelin, Manoeuvre, pp. 126-128.

An alternate version of this episode has Joffre threatening to have Lanrezac shot. Neither man mentioned this threat in his memoirs, and Spears and most historians discount it as an exaggerated rumour. See Spears, Liaison, p. 252 n.; Caffrey, Farewell, Leicester Square, p. 135; Tuchman, The Guns of August, p. 370; Beau and Gaubusseau, Lanrezac, p. 156 n. Georges Blond considers the treat a possibility due to Joffre's anger. See Blond, La Marne, p. 62.

It is most unlikely that Joffre ever threatened to order Lanrezac's execution, for the Generalissimo had been appalled

at Messimy's advice to have incompetent field commanders shot. He chose, instead, to cashier them. See Joffre, Mémoires, I, pp. 257-258, 301-305.

[13]Lanrezac, Le Plan de campagne français, pp. 224-226; Beau and Gaubusseau, Lanrezac, pp. 155-158; Joffre, Mémoires, I, pp. 332-333; Terraine, Mons, p. 166; Recouly, Joffre, pp. 95-96; Ascoli, The Mons Star, p. 125.

[14]Stewart, "Lanrezac, Joffre, and Plan XVII," pp. 189-190.

[15]AFGG, T1: 2 (A2) no. 1398, p. 8 n.1; Lanrezac, Le Plan de campagne français, pp. 240-242; Spears, Liaison, pp. 274-276; Huguet, Britain and the War, pp. 74-76; Gamelin, Manoeuvre, p. 135; Beau and Gaubusseau, Lanrezac, pp. 178-180; Terraine, Mons, pp. 178-179; Ascoli, The Mons Star, pp. 128-129.

[16]Blond, The Marne, pp. 45-46; Stewart, "Lanrezac, Joffre, and Plan XVII," p. 182.

[17]According to Lanrezac, an army commander (not identified) asked him after the meeting if he thought Joffre had any ideas. Lanrezac claims to have replied affirmatively, but he did so in order to conceal his own doubts from his colleague. See Lanrezac, Le Plan de campagne français, pp. 60-62.

In his memoirs, Joffre states that it was too early to announce details of his intention to operate in Belgium. Since there were so many unknown factors to consider, Joffre contented himself with divulging only a broad outline of his strategy. See Joffre, Mémoires, I, p. 236.

The Generalissimo's explanation is plausible, especially when one considers the need for secrecy in wartime. However, Plan XVII had been partially based on the premise that the Germans would advance through eastern Belgium, which meant that French forces would not be unwelcome in that country; Joffre could have informed a select group of generals about his intention to dispatch troops there, without worrying about revealing "secrets." Moreover, the Commander-in-Chief admits that he spoke of the offensives in Lorraine and the Ardennes, and it must be remembered that Dubail's question concerned the VII Corps' march into Alsace.

It seems probable that Joffre wanted to avoid having his plans (or, more accurately, lack of plans) criticized. See W.A. Stewart, "Lanrezac, Joffre, and Plan XVII," p. 182.

[18]Giraud, Castelnau, pp. 31-32.

[19]Recouly, Joffre, p. 92.

[20]Spears, Liaison, pp. 181, 252-253.

[21]General Sauret (III Corps) was cashiered for incompetence on August 28, and his replacement, Hache, did not like responsibility and made no secret of his pessimism. The Generalissimo dismissed the defeatist General Mas-Latrie (XVIII Corps) on September 5. General Desforges (X Corps) refused to obey Lanrezac's instructions to avoid offensive operations on August 22, with disastrous results. Franchet d' Esperey (I Corps) was an outstanding field commander. See Contamine, La Victoire, p. 189; AFGG, T1: 3 (A1) no. 161; T1: 1 (A) nos. 760, 779; Spears, Liaison, p. 418; Joffre, Mémoires, I, p. 388.

[22]AFGG, T1: 1 (A) no. 858; T1: 2 (A1) no. 860.

[23]Weygand, Mémoires, I, pp. 95-96; Weygand, Foch, p. 63.

[24]AFGG, T1 :2 (A2) no. 1535.

[25]Recouly, Joffre, p. 113; Dominique, La Victoire, p. 242; Contamine, La Victoire, pp. 226-227.

[26]Joffre, Mémoires, I, pp. 229, 332, 339; Terraine, Mons, pp. 166, 174; Goutard, La Marne, p. 167; Ascoli, The Mons Star, p. 128.

[27]AFGG, T 1: 2 (A2) no. 1976; Spears, Liaison, pp. 340-341; Terraine, Mons, p. 194; Contamine, La Victoire, p. 225.
In his memoirs, Lanrezac simply states that the retreat caused him profound sadness. See Lanrezac, Le Plan de campagne français, pp. 262-263.
Pau and Lanrezac met in Bordeaux in early September. According to Pau, Lanrezac seemed and looked as robust as ever. See Beau and Gaubusseau, Lanrezac, pp. 204-205, 242.
This statement is probably true, but it should be remembered that Lanrezac had had several days to recover from the stress of commanding troops in battle. It is doubtful that he would have regained his vigour if he had continued to conduct military operations.

[28]See Joffre, Mémoires, I, pp. 339, 344-345, 350-351 for the robust health of Franchet d'Esperey, Maunoury, Sarrail and de Langle, respectively. For Foch's hardiness, see Terraine, Mons, p. 123. For de Castelnau, see Gamelin, Manoeuvre, p. 97; Giraud, Castelnau, pp. 39, 42; Caffrey, Farewell, Leicester Square, p. 67; Contamine, La Victoire, p. 160. For Dubail, see Ralston, The Army of the Republic, p. 326.
Even the optimistic Joffre suffered from one minor bout of temporary depression during the campaign: on August 29, General Wilson found him to be fatigued and downcast because of Sir John's refusal to stand and fight. See Huguet, Britain and the War, pp. 75-76; Prete, "Coalition Warfare," p. 219;

Asprey, The First Battle, p. 78.

Consequently, the Generalissimo was, in all probability, able to understand and forgive de Castelnau's occasional periods of short-lived pessimism. Joffre was far more concerned about the consistent pattern of poor health that he perceived (accurately) in Lanrezac and Pau, and (erroneously) in Ruffey.

[29] Stewart, "Lanrezac, Joffre, and Plan XVII," p. 182; Tuchman, The Guns of August, p. 183.

[30] Ibid., p. 242.

[31] AFGG, T1: 1 (A) no. 1084; T1: 2 (A1) no. 871.

There is no record of Ruffey ever having corrected his corps commanders, except for General Brochin, the Commander of the V Corps, who was removed on August 23. Ruffey's sarcastic advice to Brochin shows that he was not reluctant to criticize his corps commanders. The lack of any recorded order of a similar nature to Generals Boëlle (IV Corps) and Micheler (Brochin's successor) may indicate that their performances met his expectations. Ruffey was definitely pleased with Sarrail's performance as Commander of the Sixth Corps. See Tanenbaum, Sarrail, p. 40.

[32] Joffre, Mémoires, I, p. 350; Gamelin, Manoeuvre, pp. 142-143; Isselin, The Battle of the Marne, p. 78; Tanenbaum, Sarrail, p. 40; Asprey, The First Battle, p. 79.

[33] AFGG, T1: 1 (A) no. 1273; Joffre, Mémoires, I, pp. 337, 461-462.

[34] Général Joseph Gallieni, Les Carnets de Gallieni (Paris: Albin Michel, Editeur, 1932), p. 42.

CONCLUSIONS

All ten French army commanders possessed the qualities and skills required to hold the posts they occupied in August and September 1914.

The seven non-limoges worked co-operatively with their superiors, colleagues and subordinates, and remained emotionally calm but physically energetic. Based on the limited available evidence, Dubail, Sarrail, Foch and Franchet d'Esperey always exercised sound judgment during their tenures as army commanders prior to the Battle of the Marne. De Castelnau demonstrated poor judgment several times because his proposed withdrawals were soon shown to have been unnecessary. However, Joffre and (on one occasion) Dubail acknowledged the possibility that the Commander of the Second Army might have to retreat, regardless of how much he desired to maintain his present positions. They asked him to hold for as long as possible, and he succeeded in carrying out his missions. Maunoury and de Langle committed several errors in judgment, but these minor mistakes did not cause their armies serious problems. These seven generals conducted operations competently. Joffre thought that each possessed the qualities and skills needed to command an army in wartime, and his evaluations were correct.[1]

Pau's judgment and relationships with other generals are difficult to assess due to the limited number of available documents. However, his admission of deteriorating health

was in itself enough justification for Joffre not to have offered him another field command after the disbandment of the Army of Alsace.[2]

The greatest controversy surrounding Lanrezac was his decision to withdraw on August 23. Most contemporaries and historians believe he acted properly.[3] The only known dissenter is Adolphe Goutard who writes of Bülow and Hausen's passivity and the BEF's steadfastness, which made Lanrezac's reason for retiring somewhat suspect. According to Goutard, the Fifth Army's retreat could have been carried out in good order at a later date.[4] His argument seems valid, but it is necessary to recall that the German First Army was over three times as large as the BEF, and Lanrezac had no way of knowing how long the British would be able to withstand Kluck's attacks: a complete collapse, which would have endangered the Fifth Army's left flank, was not beyond the realm of possibility. Moreover, had the French stayed put, Bülow and Hausen probably would have engaged them the next day, with the result that Lanrezac would have had a very difficult time disengaging his units. His decision to pull back ruined the German strategy of enveloping the left wing of the French Army. Therefore, Lanrezac made the correct decision.

According to some contemporaries and historians, Lanrezac performed well at Guise only because Joffre's presence and the written order the Generalissimo had given to him the previous day absolved the Commander of the Fifth Army of responsibility

for the outcome of the battle.[5] John Terraine argues, therefore, that Guise was the "final proof of [Lanrezac's] unfitness for high command."[6] Such was not the case. Although the Generalissimo had complied with his subordinate's request for a written order, what Joffre put in writing was no more binding on Lanrezac than his verbal instructions had been. The Commander of the Fifth Army still had to conduct the battle himself, and even his superior's physical presence did not alter that fact. It is also worth remembering that Lanrezac executed his most brilliant manoeuvre after Joffre's departure.

However, other factors must be considered in Lanrezac's dismissal. He bore most of the blame for the estrangment between Sir John French and himself. The Commander of the Fifth Army was, paradoxically, always right but invariably wrong in his relationship with Joffre. Since events proved him correct about the extent of the German invasion through western Belgium, Lanrezac's perception was superior to that of the Generalissimo. However, he seemed to suspect that because Supreme Headquarters had made one mistake, it would never act competently in any matter.[7] His arguments against attacking Kluck at Guise were valid, but it was the heighth of folly for him to have publicly ridiculed Joffre. Lanrezac acted within the confines of military regulations when he asked for a written order, but it must have angered the Generalissimo to have received such a near-mutinous request

from a senior officer. As for the Commander of the Fifth Army's refusal to withdraw without written orders, it was legally correct but military foolish. In addition, Lanrezac's failure to direct subordinates, deteriorating health, and blatant defeatism on September 2 finally obliged the reluctant Generalissimo to cashier him the following day.[8] In light of the aforementioned evidence, Joffre was completely justified in removing Lanrezac.[9]

Ruffey's generalship was competent rather than brilliant. The limited available evidence unquestionably refutes the assertion of historians John Keegan and Andrew Wheatcroft that he was "incompetent."[10] Even his inaccurate pre-combat evaluation of intelligence reports was quickly rectified. On August 23, Supreme Headquarters still insisted that the Third Army faced only three enemy corps; however, Ruffey's intelligence officers correctly identified five enemy units of that size.[11] Moreover, Ruffey's contemporaries did not criticize his generalship. On August 25, Joffre made a favourable report to Messimy, who was once again the Minister of War, on the Commander of the Third Army's conduct during the first days of the campaign.[12] Five days later, Sarrail accepted command of the Third Army, but he did so reluctantly because he had greatly admired his predecessor both as a man and a general during the campaign.[13]

Ruffey did not have to undergo the strain of dealing with foreign generals. He did criticize Joffre in front of a

liaison officer from Supreme Headquarters. However, it is essential to remember that the remark was made early in the campaign, and that Joffre also ignored one of Lanrezac's unkind comments on August 24 about his lack of intelligence.[14] When Lanrezac publicly stated his opinion again three days later, Joffre quickly made his displeasure known. There is no evidence that Ruffey ever publicly ridiculed his Commander-in-Chief a second time.

Joffre cashiered Ruffey, ostensibly for reasons of poor health.[15] Actually, Ruffey's constitution remained strong even during the worst crisis. On August 22, a liaison officer from Supreme Headquarters informed Joffre that the potentially disastrous situation facing the Third Army had been averted thanks to its commander's calmness and good judgment.[16] No evidence has ever been presented which proves Ruffey's health declined between then and August 30.[17]

Ruffey said and did many of the same things as Lanrezac; but the former's positive qualities outshone those of the latter, and his defects were far less serious. The Generalissimo cashiered so many senior officers that mistakes in judgment could not be totally avoided. His removal of Ruffey was the only incorrect personnel decision he made with respect to the ten army commanders during the Battle of the Frontiers and the Great Retreat.[18]

The large number of dismissed generals during the Great Retreat indicates that there were certain deficiencies in the

pre-war training of senior French officers. Unfortunately, Joffre had had insufficient time to rectify these inadequacies prior to the outbreak of hostilities. Once the conflict began, the incompetence of many generals soon became apparent. The Commander-in-Chief rarely hesitated to cashier senior officers, even army commanders, whom he deemed unequal to their tasks. He made two questionable personnel decisions with respect to his army commanders (recalling Pau from retirement and replacing Ruffey). In general, those whom he promoted in August and September 1914 performed as well as or better than the ones who had been designated army commanders before the German invasion of France and Belgium. This improvement manifested itself during the Battle of the Marne because all seven army commanders directed operations competently and retained their posts. The amelioration in the performances of senior officers continued until 1918 when Foch, the Allied Generalissimo on the Western Front, and Franchet d'Esperey, the Allied Commander-in-Chief in Eastern Europe, played significant roles in the final victory over Germany.

Joffre's removal of incompetent generals and his replacement of them by officers who had proved their competence in positions of lesser responsibility in combat marked the first step on the long road towards the eventual Allied triumph. That first step was the real significance of the Great Retreat of 1914.

NOTES TO THE CONCLUSIONS

[1] After the Battle of the Marne, Dubail commanded the Southern Army Group from January 1915 to March 1916. He greatly reduced the number of cannons around Verdun because he and Joffre thought fortresses were obsolete. One month after the beginning of the Battle of Verdun, the Generalissimo, who blamed Dubail for the weakened condition of the fortresses, removed him from his post. The latter spent the rest of the war as Military Governor of Paris. He died in 1934. See Herwig and Heyman, Biographical Dictionary, pp. 134-135.

Joffre removed Sarrail as Commander of the Third Army in July 1915 because the latter performed badly during a German offensive. Due to political influence, Sarrail was given the post of Commander of the French Army in Macedonia; he became Commander of the Allied Armies in Greece in 1917. In December of that year, documents from Sarrail's headquarters were discovered in the possession of pro-German Frenchmen in Paris, and the Ministry of Premier Georges Clemenceau placed him on the inactive list for the remainder of the war. Sarrail worked as a left-wing journalist for the next six years. When his political patrons formed a government, they recalled him to active duty. Sarrail served as High Commissioner in Syria and Lebanon, but his failure to suppress armed revolts and his unnecessary bombardment of the rebel enclaves of Damascus resulted in his dismissal in 1925. Sarrail died in 1929. See Herwig and Heyman, Biographical Dictionary, pp. 309-311.

Foch commanded the Northern Army Group from January 1915 to December 1916. He then served as a military consultant in Italy and eventually as Chief of Staff of the French Army. In April 1918, Foch was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Armies on the Western Front, and, in that capacity, directed the offensives which resulted in victory over Germany. Foch died in 1929. See Herwig and Heyman, Biographical Dictionary, pp. 151-154.

Franchet d'Esperey commanded the Fifth Army until December 1916 and then the Northern Army Group until May 1918. A successful German offensive that spring resulted in his "promotion" as Commander of the Allied Armies in Greece. In November, his troops entered Hungary. While actively serving in Tunisia fifteen years later, he was gravely injured in an automobile accident. Franchet d'Esperey died in 1942. See Herwig and Heyman, Biographical Dictionary, pp. 154-155.

De Castelnau became Commander of the Centre Army Group in June 1915, Joffre's Chief of Staff six months later, and Commander of the Southern Army Group in 1917. He directed the final French offensive of the war in Lorraine. De Castelnau served as a Deputy in the French Parliament from 1919 to 1924. He died in 1944. See Herwig and Heyman, Biographical Dictionary, pp. 110-112.

Maunoury commanded the Sixth Army until he was blinded in

one eye during a visit to the front in March 1915. He served as Military Governor of Paris for one year, and then retired. Maunoury died in 1923. See Herwig and Heyman, Biographical Dictionary, pp. 245-246.

De Langle served as Commander of the Centre Army Group from December 1915 to February 1916 when Joffre removed him due to advanced age. De Langle became Inspector of the French Army in North Africa, and then was retired in December 1917. He died in 1927. See Herwig and Heyman, Biographical Dictionary, p. 219.

[2] The Seventh Army faced only a small number of German militia units. Pau's failure to attack them vigorously resulted in Dubail's right flank being left uncovered during the Battle of the Frontiers. See AFGG, T1: 1 (A) nos. 649, 651, 765; Joffre, Mémoires, I, p. 300; Canadian General Staff, The Western Front 1914, p. 32.

Pau's lack of vigour may have been caused by emotional and physical fatigue.

After the Generalissimo had disbanded the Army of Alsace, he placed Pau at the disposition of the Minister of War in Bordeaux, to where the Government had moved on September 2 in order to avoid being captured during the anticipated German assault on Paris. Millerand assigned Pau to Supreme Headquarters. Joffre then sent him on a military mission to Belgium in October 1914, and to Russian General Headquarters the following year, where he served as Chief of the French Military Mission for several months. The Generalissimo then placed the former Commander of the Seventh Army on the retired list. Pau died in 1932. See Beau and Gaubusseau, Lanrezac, p. 204; Joffre, Mémoires, I, pp. 337, 461-462; II, pp. 177-178; Keegan and Wheatcroft, Who's Who in Military History, p. 259.

[3] AFGG, T1: 1, p. 497; Gamelin, Manoeuvre, p. 74; Beau and Gaubusseau, Lanrezac, p. 134; Stewart, "Lanrezac, Joffre and Plan XVII," p. 189; Pierrefeu, Plutarque a menti, pp. 72-73; Tuchman, The Guns of August, pp. 253-254.

[4] Goutard, La Marne, pp. 133-134.

[5] Spears, Liaison, pp. 268-269; Ascoli, The Mons Star, p. 128; Dominique, La Victoire, p. 198; Cassar, Sir John French, p. 129.

[6] Terraine, Mons, p. 174.

[7] Spears, Liaison, p. 371.

[8] Joffre, Mémoires, I, pp. 370-371; Gamelin, Manoeuvre, p. 161; Recouly, Joffre, pp. 89-96; Blond, The Marne, pp. 102-104; Isselin, The Battle of the Marne, pp. 96-98.

According to Barbara Tuchman, another reason why Joffre cashiered Lanrezac was because the latter's assessments of the military situations were always correct. See Tuchman, The Guns of August, p. 417. Georges Blond believes that personal animosity played a role in the Generalissimo's decision to remove the Commander of the Fifth Army. See Georges Blond, The Marne, p. 103.

Tuchman and Blond's assertions are probably valid, for Lanrezac's lucid arguments irritated his Commander-in-Chief. However, the factors that the two aforementioned historians emphasize were, it would seem, of only minor importance; rather, the evidence indicates that Joffre dismissed his subordinate because he needed Sir John French's co-operation in order to undertake the impending counter-offensive which Supreme Headquarters was contemplating. The Generalissimo surmised (probably correctly) that the Briton would keep retreating as long as Lanrezac commanded the Fifth Army. See Dominique, La Victoire, p. 241; Gamelin, Manoeuvre, pp. 110-111; Prete, "Coalition Warfare," p. 278.

[9] After having removed Lanrezac, Joffre placed him at the disposition of Gallieni. However, the Military Governor of Paris did not assign Lanrezac to a post in his command; rather, he sent the former Commander of the Fifth Army to Millerand. Lanrezac received six minor rear-echelon posts during the next three years, the most important of which was Inspector General of the Infantry. Diabetes forced him to retire prematurely in 1917. Lanrezac died in 1925. See Beau and Gaubusseau, Lanrezac, pp. 200-210, 222-223; Herwig and Heyman, Biographical Dictionary, pp. 219-220.

[10] Keegan and Wheatcroft, Who's Who in Military History, p. 287.

[11] AFGG, T1: 1 (A) no. 1078.

[12] Spears, Liaison, p. 220.

[13] Tanenbaum, Sarrail, p. 40.

[14] Isselin, The Battle of the Marne, p. 57.

[15] According to Fernand Engerand, the Deputy who headed the post-war commission of inquiry into the reasons for the French Army's defeats in August and September 1914, Ruffey was dismissed because he would not let his staff make his decisions for him. See Beau and Gaubusseau, Lanrezac, p. 144.

It seems unlikely that Joffre cashiered Ruffey for this reason; rather, the Generalissimo probably would have approved of his subordinate's decisiveness. In fact, Joffre blamed Ruffey's Chief of Staff for most of the (alleged) dissension at Third Army Headquarters. See Joffre, Mémoires, I, pp. 343-

345.

This might imply that the Generalissimo thought that Ruffey was too passive vis-à-vis his Chief of Staff, but Joffre never said so explicitly.

Barbara Tuchman claims that Ruffey was cashiered because Joffre needed a scapegoat for his unsuccessful offensive of August 22. See Tuchman, The Guns of August, p. 387.

Tuchman's analysis is plausible, but she does not offer any evidence to support her contention. It must also be remembered that Joffre did not dismiss de Langle or Maunoury. Moreover, the Generalissimo probably would not have waited eight days if all he wanted was to find a scapegoat.

[16]AFGG, T 1: 1 (A) no. 854.

It is also important to note that Major Bel, the liaison officer who telephoned Supreme Headquarters, was not sympathetic towards field commanders. Sarrail believed that Bel would do almost anything to ensure that senior officers were cashiered and replaced by those affiliated to Supreme Headquarters. See Tanenbaum, Sarrail, p. 53.

Sarrail was specifically referring to Bel's attitude and behaviour in 1915, and it is possible that the Commander of the Third Army exaggerated the degree of Bel's ruthlessness. However, his observation gives added weight to the opinion of Henry Contamine, who considered Bel to have had the mentality of an inquisitor during the summer of 1914. See Contamine, La Victoire, p. 190.

[17]According to Pierre Dominique, Ruffey seemed to be still profoundly shaken on August 27 by the defeats which had occurred five days earlier. See Dominique, La Victoire, p. 197.

No one else has ever mentioned this illustration of Ruffey's supposed deteriorating emotional health, and Dominique makes the supposition without providing the factual evidence to support it.

[18]There is little available information on Ruffey's life after August 30, 1914 despite the fact that he, unlike Lanrezac, did not refrain from publicly criticizing Joffre during the war; rather, Ruffey asked the Government three times to remove the Generalissimo for incompetence, but his appeals proved unsuccessful. In 1916, Ruffey told Major Bel that Lanrezac had saved France during the Battle of the Frontiers and the Great Retreat. See Beau and Gaubusseau, Lanrezac, pp. 10-11, 275.

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